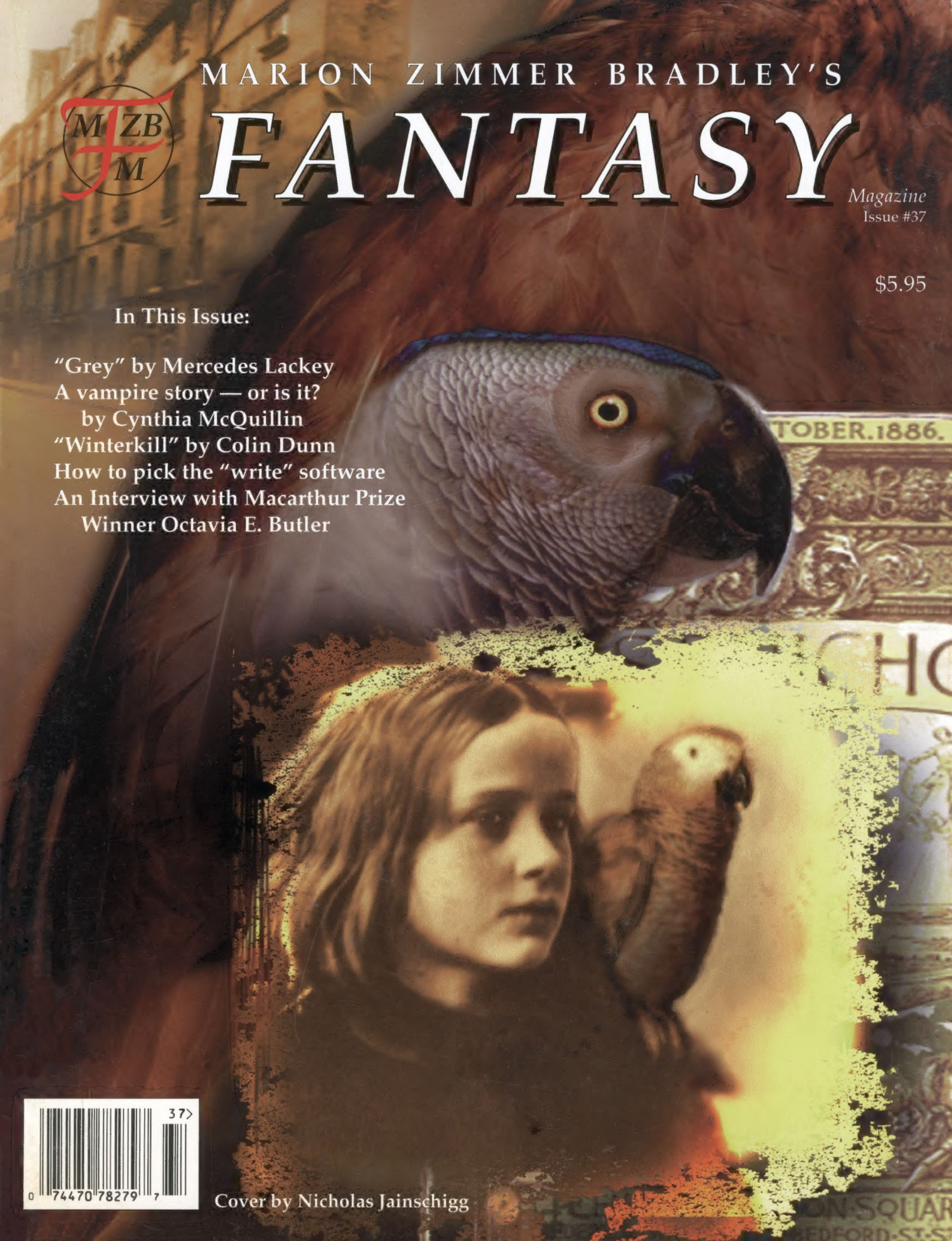
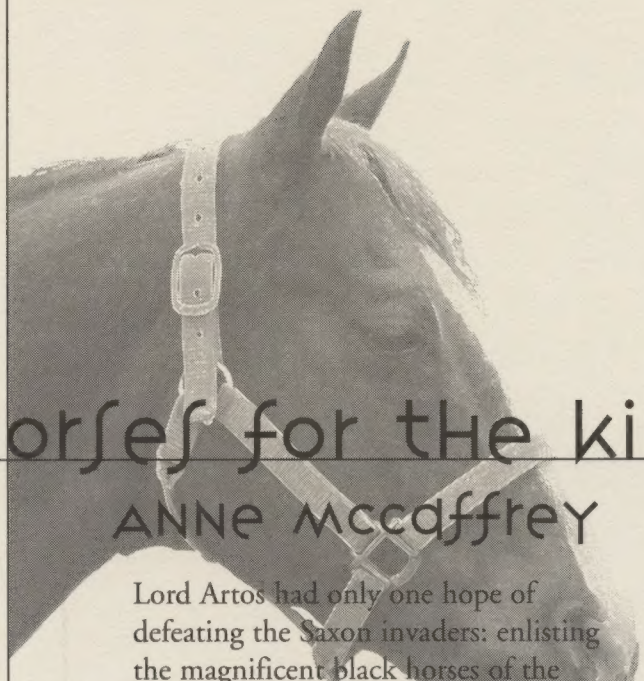

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY
Magazine
Issue #37
$5.95
In This Issue:
"Grey" by Mercedes Lackey
A vampire story — or is it?
by Cynthia McQuillin
"Winterkill" by Colin Dunn
How to pick the "write" software
An Interview with Macarthur Prize
Winner Octavia E. Butler
TOBER.1886.
37
0 74470 78279 7
Cover by Nicholas Jainschigg

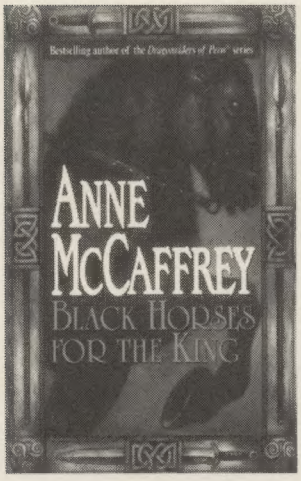
THE BESTSELLING CREATOR OF SCIENCE FICTION'S FAVORITE DRAGONS NOW GIVES EQUAL TIME TO FANTASY'S MOST FAMOUS KNIGHT!



black horses for the king

ANNE McCAFFREY

Lord Artos had only one hope of defeating the Saxon invaders: enlisting the magnificent black horses of the desert to carry his warriors into battle. But finding the glorious beasts meant a perilous journey...and demanded the assistance of Galwyn Varianus—the remarkable boy who would help Lord Artos to claim his throne as King Arthur! With all of the adventure and suspense of her Dragonriders of Pern novels, Anne McCaffrey brings an original historical fantasy to vivid life.



A Del Rey® Paperback

DEL REY

Stories That Define Imagination
A Division of The Ballantine Publishing Group
http://www.randomhouse.com/delrey/

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY
Magazine

EDITORIAL

One of the things I am always being asked is "how long should my story be?" The answer is obvious; it should be as long as it needs to be.

That doesn't mean too much, however; recently I read a Stephen King novel (not his best) which had the exact same plot as a worthy old short story called "The Monkey's Paw".

The novel is about 100,000 words; the short story is about 1,000. They both tell the exact same story: a father's son dies, he wishes for him to come back, and when he gets his wish, he discovers that he doesn't really want it.

The short story is a small masterpiece. The novel is not one of King's best, and I personally feel that it should have been, at most, half its length.

The fact that writers are frequently paid by the word tempts them to write longer stories. But when you chose a length for your story, have some consideration for the editor.

Most stories I get are over 5,000 words. Most stories I buy are under 3,000. Longer stories are generally bought by pre-arrangement, and right now I have enough for the next two years.

I wish I could remember who wrote "The Monkey's Paw" — it's been about 20 years since I last read it, and the story has really stuck in my mind. In general, a story you remember for 20 years is a story well worth reading — or writing.

The point is that you should plan your story beforehand, having some idea of what length it should be. And, if it's for me, the shorter the better.

Marion Zimmer Bradley

EDITOR
Marion Zimmer Bradley

PUBLISHER
Rachel E. Holmen

CLERICAL ASSISTANCE
Margaret Davis

SECRETARY TO MRS. BRADLEY:
Elisabeth Waters

PROOFREADING
Gil Lamont
Debbie Notkin

Issue #37 – Autumn 1997 – Vol. 10 #1

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY Magazine
ISSN 0897-9286
Published by the Marion Zimmer Bradley Living Trust, P.O. Box 249, Berkeley, California 94701, (510) 644-9222
http://www.mzbfm.com

SUBMISSIONS:
Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine* welcomes free-lance submissions from people who have read our guidelines. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with adequate return postage. *FANTASY Magazine*, a quarterly, publishes original short fiction with fantasy elements in the range of 500 to 5,500 words. The most suitable length and the one most often purchased is between 3,500 and 4,000 words. While every precaution will be taken, we cannot assume liability for unsolicited manuscripts. A duplicate should be retained. Sample copies of the magazine are available for writers and artists at a special rate of $4.00 including postage and handling. Requests for WRITERS' or ARTISTS' GUIDELINES should include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:
All written comments, questions, and suggestions regarding any aspect of the magazine are read by our editor and are assumed to be intended for publication. We reserve the right to edit all submissions. Letters must include sender's name and address.

SUBSCRIPTIONS and BACK ISSUES:
Individual subscriptions are $20.00 for 4 issues in the U.S., $27.00 in Canada, $44.00 foreign subscriptions. All subscriptions, including Canadian, are payable directly in U.S. funds only. Individual copies of the current issue are $5.95 plus shipping. Shipping charges are $1.00 per copy in U.S., $2.00 in Canada, foreign $6.00. **Back issues:** include $4.95 for each back issue (issues 33 and before). Issues 34, 35, and 36 are $5.95. Include $2.50 per order shipping in U.S.

ADVERTISING:
Rates available on request.

BOOKSELLERS and SCHOOLS:
Discounts available for multiple copies of the same issue.

Contents copyright © 1997 by Marion Zimmer Bradley Living Trust
Third class postage paid at Berkeley, CA.

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to:
Marion Zimmer Bradley
P.O. Box 249, Berkeley, CA 94701-0249

BACK ISSUE ORDER FORM

___ Issue #2 (Fall 1988) – *Bone Serai* - cover story by Susan Shwartz; G. Barr cover
___ Issue #3 (Winter 1989) *The Adinkra Cloth* - Mary C. Aldridge.
___ Issue #5 (Summer 1989) – "The Dragon Issue" Cover art by George Barr.
___ Issue #7 (Winter 1990) – *Daughter of the Oak* - David M. Shea. *The Hall of the Winter Folk* - cover story by Stephen C. Fisher.
___ Issue #8 (Spring 1990) "Science-Fiction/Fantasy" Issue. *Change* - cover story by Jo Clayton; cover art by James Balkovek.
___ Issue #14 (Fall 1991) – *Black Ribbon* - Dawn Albright; cover by Gail Butler. *The Tengu's Scroll* - Dana Kramer-Rolls. *The Wuzzles* - M. Z. Bradley.
___ Issue #16 (Spring-Summer 1992) – *Never Look at a Gift Sword in the Horse's Mouth* - Jennifer Roberson; cover by Alan Gutierrez.
___ Issue #17 (Fall 1992) – *Pandemonium* - Sue Young Wilson; cover by George Barr.
___ Issue #18 (Winter 1992) – *Arakney's Web* - Jo Clayton; cover by Nick Jainschigg. *The Black Tower* - Laura Underwood. *Queeneyes* - eluki bes shahar.
___ Issue #20 (Summer 1993) – *Cannibal Sorcerer* - Evangeline Walton & Bruce D. Arthurs. *Maiden, Are You Warm?* - Isabel Cole.
___ Issue #21 (Fall 1993) – *First Love, Last Love* - Tanya Huff. *Mages of Carthia* - Cynthia McQuillin. *Growing Season* - Dorothy J. Heydt.
___ Issue #22 (Winter 1993) – *Mad Evren's Dreams* - Phyllis Ann Karr; cover by Alicia Austin.
___ Issue #23 (Spring 1994) – *Killer Byte* - Mercedes Lackey; cover by Vincent Di Fate. *To Kill the Undead* - Marion Zimmer Bradley. Peter Beagle interview.
___ Issue #24 (Summer 1994) – *Ice Princess* - Elisabeth Waters; cover by David Cherry. *The First Maxim* - Steven Piziks. Katherine Kurtz interview.
___ Issue #25 (Fall 1994) – *The Masterpainter* - Diana L. Paxson; cover by Jill Bauman. *On the Holy Mountain* - Darrell Schweitzer.
___ Issue #26 (Winter 1994) – *Dinner Music* - Jo Clayton; cover by Nick Jainschigg. *Fool's Fire* - Marion Zimmer Bradley. Interview with Jennifer Roberson.
___ Issue #27 (Spring 1995) – *Pot of Dreams* - C.J. Cherryh & Jane S. Fancher; cover by David A. Cherry. *A Little Night Music* - Dorothy J. Heydt. *The Chocolate Genie* - Ginger Strivelli. *Spaces* - Edwina Mayer.
___ Issue #28 (Summer 1995) – *The Harder They Fall* - Tanya Huff; cover by Bob Eggleton. *The Long Divorce of Steel* - eluki bes shahar.
___ Issue #29 (Fall 1995) – *Bloodsong* - Jo Clayton; cover by Nicholas Jainschigg. *Humphrey's Dilemma* - Cynthia McQuillin.
___ Issue #30 (Winter 1996) – *A Prince Among Frogs* - Elisabeth Waters; cover by Jonathan Hunt. *The Counterfit Maiden* - Richard Purtill.
___ Issue #31 (Spring 1996) – *The Weeping Loon* - RobinWayne Bailey; cover by James Balkovek
___ Issue #32 (Summer 1996) – *Fox Maid's Travail* - Jo Clayton; cover by Nicholas Jainschigg.
___ Issue #33 (Fall 1996) – *A Sphinx in the Mind* - Karen Anderson; cover by Margaret Organ-Kean
___ Issue #34 (Winter 1997) – *Thin Man* - Steven Piziks; cover by George Barr
___ Issue #35 (Spring 1997) – *Maiden Phoenix* - India Edghill; cover Vincent Di Fate
___ Issue #36 (Summer 1997) – *The Knife that Makes Men* - Mary Aldridge; cover by Alicia Austin and George Barr. *A Certain Talent* - Dorothy J. Heydt
___ Issue #37 (Fall 1997) – *Grey* - Mercedes Lackey; cover by Nicholas Jainschigg

Issues #1, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 19 sold out, full sets no longer available

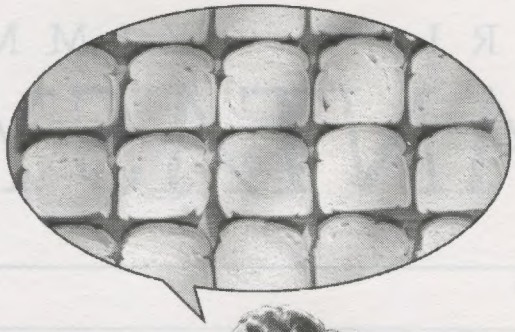
Get these back issues while they last! Enclose $4.95 for each back issue (issues 33 and before). Issues 34 and newer are $5.95. Include $2.50 postage *per order* (NOT per issue!).

Name: _____

Address: _____

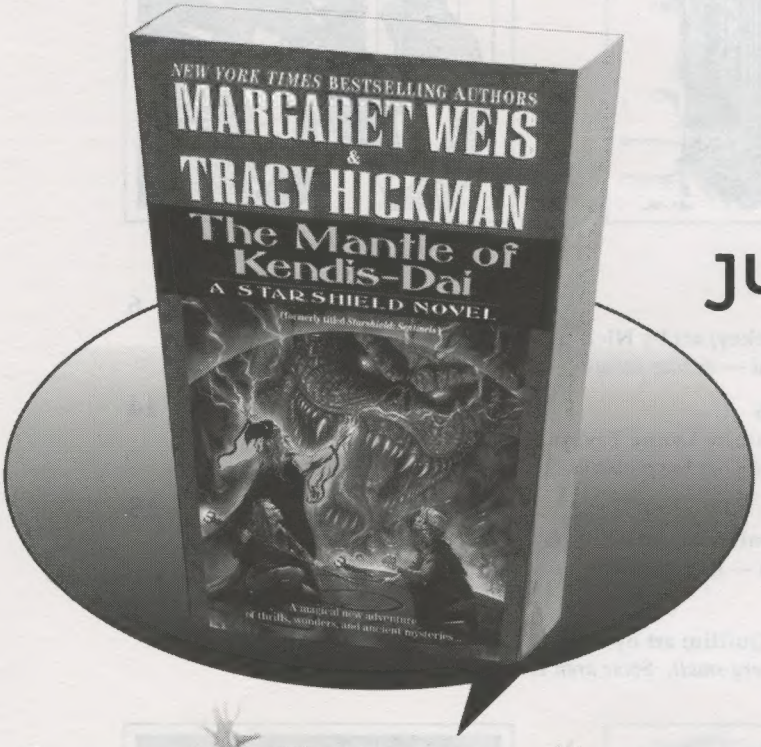
City, State, Zip: _____

Please enclose check or money order in U.S. currency and make payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley. Send to P.O. Box 249, Berkeley, CA 94701.
Visa/MC _____ **Exp.** _____ **Signature** _____



IS YOUR IMAGINATION

STUCK IN NEUTRAL?



THEN GIVE IT A

JUMP START...

WITH THE ELECTRIFYING DEL REY DEBUT BY THE BESTSELLING CREATORS OF *DRAGONLANCE®* AND *DEATHGATE*!

DEL REY

stories that define imagination
a division of the ballantine publishing group
http://www.randomhouse.com/delrey/

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY Magazine

Issue 37 Autumn 1997

Page 6

Page 14

Cover Story

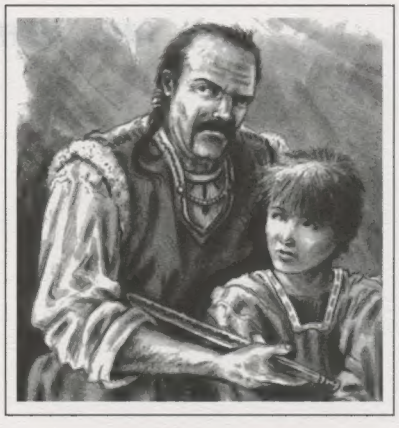
Grey 6
by Mercedes Lackey; art by Nick Jainschigg
Does a pet protect a child — or vice versa?

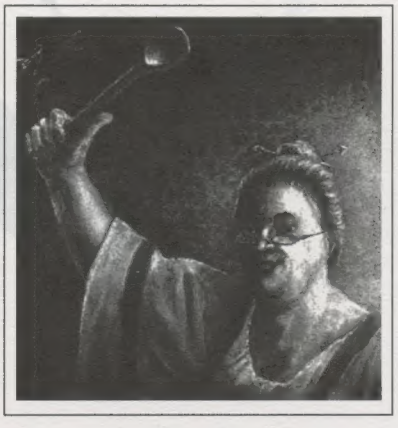
Agent Problems 14
by J.G. Hemry; art by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk
A Secret (literary) Agent's life has problems

Green Man 18
by Richard Calantropio; art by Margaret Organ-Kean
Generally the green man — or green lady — is spring

Exterminator 23
by Cynthia Mc Quillin; art by Kaja Foglio
Most vermin are very, very small. Some aren't.

Page 34





Page 28

Rogue Soup 28
by Janet Stewart; art by Rob Alexander
A powerful witch cooks up some protection for her friends

Dark Queen 32
by Kathryn J. Brown; art by Vincent Di Fate
Who is "the dark lady" ?

Winterkill 34
by Colin Dunn; art by Jonathan Hunt
A tense, thrilling story about mistrust in a family threatened by danger

The Isle of Despair 53
by Richard L. Purtill; art by George Barr
A strange mythic tale of ancient times

Quickly Wise 57
by Devon Monk; art by Barb Armata
Sometimes what you wish for isn't what you expected, even if it's wonderful

Wallan's Sanity Test 60
by Carl Bowen; art by Barb Armata
Doubts about sanity prove you are sane. Does it work the other way?

Regular Features

The Write Class 40
by Steven Piziks
Choosing a writing class that's not genre-hostile

The Write Software 41
by Ann Sharp
Plotting software, script-writing software...

Results of the Cauldron 43

Letters 45

An Interview with Octavia E. Butler 46
by Steven Piziks

The Last Word 62
by Rachel E. Holmen

The Cauldron 64

Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

Grey

by Mercedes Lackey

For nine years, Sarah Jane Lyon-White lived happily with her parents in the heart of Africa. Her father was a physician, her mother, a nurse and they worked at a Protestant mission in the Congo. She was happy there, not the least because her mother and father were far more enlightened than many another mission worker in the days when Victoria was Queen; taking the cause of healing as more sacred than that of conversion, they undertook to work *with* the natives, and made friends instead of enemies among the shamans and medicine-people. Because of this, Sarah was a cherished and protected child, although she was no stranger to the many dangers of life in the Congo.

When she was six, and far older in responsibility than most of her peers, one of the shaman brought her a parrot-chick still in quills; he taught her how to feed and care for it, and told her that while *it* was a child, she was to protect it, but when it was grown, it would protect and guide *her*. She called the parrot "Grey," and it became her best friend — and indeed, although she never told her parents, it became her protector as well.

But when she was nine, her parents sent her to live in England for the sake of her health. And because her mother feared that the climate of England would not be good for Grey's health, she had to leave her beloved friend behind.

Now, this was quite the usual thing in the days when Victoria was Queen and the great British Empire was so vast that there was never an hour when some part of it was not in sunlight. It was thought that English children were more delicate than their parents, and that the inhospitable humors of hot climes would make them sicken and die. Not that their *parents* didn't sicken and die quite as readily as the children, who were, in fact, far sturdier than they were given credit for — but it was thought, by anxious mothers, that the climate of England would be far kinder to them. So off they were shipped, some as young as two and three, torn away from their anxious mamas and native nurses and sent to live with relatives or even total strangers. Now, as Mr. Kipling and Mrs. Hope-Hodgson have shown us, many of these total strangers — and no few of the relatives — were bad, wicked people, interested only in the round gold sovereigns that the children's parents sent to them for their care. There were many schools where the poor lonely things were neglected or even abused; where their health suffered far more than if they had stayed safely at the sides of their mamas.

But there were good schools too, and kindly people, and Sarah Jane's mama had been both wise and careful in her selection. In fact, Sarah Jane's mama had made a choice that was far wiser than even she had guessed....

Nan — that was her only name, for no one had told her of any other — lurked anxiously about the back gate of the Big House. She was new to this neighborhood, for her slatternly mother had lost yet another job in a gin-mill and they had been forced to move all the way across Whitechapel, and this part of London was as foreign to Nan as the wilds of Australia. She had been told by more than one of the children hereabouts that if she hung about the back gate after tea, a strange man with a towel wrapped about his head would come out with a basket of food and give it out to any child who happened to be there. Now, there were not as many children willing to accept this offering as might have been expected, even in this poor neighborhood. They were afraid of the man, afraid of his piercing, black eyes, his swarthy skin, and his way of walking like a great hunting-cat. Some suspected poison in the food, others murmured that he and the woman of the house were foreigners, and intended to kill English children with terrible curses on the food they offered. But Nan was faint with hunger; she hadn't eaten in two days, and was willing to dare poison, curses, and anything else for a bit of bread.

Furthermore, Nan had a secret defense; under duress, she could often sense the intent and even dimly hear the thoughts of others. That was how she avoided her mother when it was most dangerous to approach her, as well as avoiding other dangers in the streets themselves. Nan was certain that if this man had any ill intentions, she

Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

would know it.

Still, as tea-time and twilight both approached, she hung back a little from the wrought-iron gate, beginning to wonder if it wouldn't be better to see what, if anything, her mother brought home. If she'd found a job — or a "gen'lmun" — there might be a farthing or two to spare for food before Aggie spent the rest on gin. Behind the high, grimy wall, the Big House loomed dark and ominous against the smoky, lowering sky, and the strange, carved creatures sitting atop every pillar in the wall and every corner of the House fair gave Nan the shivers whenever she looked at them. There were no two alike, and most of them were beasts out of a rummy's worst deliriums. The only one that Nan could see that looked at all normal was a big, grey bird with a fat body and a hooked beak that sat on top of the right-hand gatepost of the back gate.

Nan had no way to tell time, but as she waited, growing colder and hungrier — and more nervous — with each passing moment, she began to think for certain that the other children had been having her on. Tea-time was surely long over; the tale they'd told her was nothing more than that, something to gull the newcomer with. It was getting dark, there were no other children waiting, and after dark it was dangerous even for a child like Nan, wise in the ways of the evil streets, to be abroad. Disappointed, and with her stomach a knot of pain, Nan began to turn away from the gate.

"I think that there is no one here, Missy S'ab," said a low, deep voice, heavily accented, sounding disappointed. Nan hastily turned back, and peering through the gloom, she barely made out a tall, dark form with a smaller one beside it.

"No, Karamjit — look there!" replied the voice of a young girl, and the smaller form pointed at Nan. A little girl ran up to the gate, and waved through the bars. "Hello! I'm Sarah — what's your name? Would you like some tea-bread? We've plenty!"

The girl's voice, also strangely accented, had none of the imperiousness that Nan would have expected coming from the child of a "toff". She sounded only friendly and helpful, and that, more than anything, is what drew Nan back to the wrought-iron gate.

"Indeed, Missy Sarah speaks the truth," the man said; and as Nan drew nearer, she saw that the other children had not exaggerated when they described him. His head was wrapped around in a cloth; he wore a long, high-colored coat of some bright stuff, and white trousers that were tucked into glossy boots. He was as fiercely erect as the iron gate itself, lean and angular as a hunting tiger, with skin so dark she could scarcely make out his features, and eyes that glittered at her like beads of black glass.

But strangest, and perhaps most ominous of all, Nan could sense nothing from the dark man. He might not even have been there; there was a blank wall where his thoughts should have been.

The little girl beside him was perfectly ordinary by comparison; a bright little wren of a thing, not pretty, but sweet, with a trusting smile that went straight to Nan's heart. Nan had a motherly side to her; the younger children of whatever neighborhood she lived in tended to flock to her, look up to her, and follow her lead. She in her turn tried to keep them out of trouble, and whenever there was extra to go around, she fed them out of her own scant stocks.

But the tall fellow frightened her, and made her nervous, especially when further moments revealed no more of his intentions than Nan had sensed before; the girl's bright eyes noted that, and she whispered something to the dark man as Nan withdrew a little. He nodded, and handed her a basket that looked promisingly heavy.

Then he withdrew out of sight, leaving the little girl alone at the gate. The child pushed the gate open enough to hand the basket through. "Please, won't you come and take this? It's awfully heavy."

In spite of the clear and open brightness of the little girl's thoughts, ten years of hard living had made Nan suspicious. The child might know nothing of what the dark man wanted. "Woi're yer givin' food away?" she asked, edging forward a little, but not yet quite willing to take the basket.

The little girl put the basket down on the ground and clasped her hands behind her back. "Well, Mem'sab says that she won't tell Maya and Selim to make less food for tea, because she won't have us going hungry while we're growing. And she says that old, stale toast is fit only for starlings, so people ought to have the good of it

before it goes stale. And she says that there's no reason why children outside our gate have to go to bed hungry when we have enough to share, and my Mum and Da say that sharing is charity and Charity is one of the cardinal virtues, so Mem'sab is being virtuous, which is a good thing, because she'll go to heaven and she would make a good angel."

Most of that came out in a rush that quite bewildered Nan, especially the last, about cardinal virtues and heaven and angels. But she did understand that "Mem'sab", whoever that was, must be one of those daft religious creatures that gave away food free for the taking, and Nan's own Mum had told her that there was no point in letting other people take what you could get from people like that. So Nan edged forward and made a snatch at the basket-handle. She tried, that is; it proved a great deal heavier than she'd thought, and she gave an involuntary grunt at the weight of it.

"Be careful," the little girl admonished mischievously. "It's heavy."

"Yer moight o' warned me!" Nan said, a bit indignant, and more than a bit excited. If this wasn't a trick — if there wasn't a brick in the basket — oh, she'd eat well tonight, and tomorrow, too!

"Come back tomorrow!" the little thing called, as she shut the gate and turned and skipped towards the house. "Remember me! I'm Sarah Jane, and I'll bring the basket tomorrow!"

"Thenkee, Sarah Jane," Nan called back, belatedly; then, just in case these strange creatures would think better of their generosity, she made the basket and herself vanish into the night.

She came earlier the next day, bringing back the now-empty basket, and found Sarah Jane waiting at the gate. To her disappointment, there was no basket waiting beside the child, and Nan almost turned back, but Sarah saw her and called to her before she could fade back into the shadows of the streets.

"Karamjit is bringing the basket in a bit," the child said, "There's things Mem'sab wants you to have. And — what am I to call you? It's rude to call you 'girl', but I don't know your name."

"Nan," Nan replied, feeling as if a cart had run over her. This child, though younger than Nan herself, had a way of taking over a situation that was all out of keeping with Nan's notion of how things were. "Wot kind o' place is this, anyway?"

"It's a school, a boarding-school," Sarah said promptly. "Mem'sab and her husband have it for the children of people who live in India, mostly. Mem'sab can't have children herself, which is very sad, but she says that means she can be a mother to us. Mem'sab came from India, and that's where Karamjit and Selim and Maya and the others are from, too; they came with her."

"Yer mean the black feller?" Nan asked, bewildered. "Yer from In'ju too?"

"No," Sarah said, shaking her head. "Africa. I wish I was back there." Her face paled and her eyes misted, and Nan, moved by an impulse she did not understand, tried to distract her with questions.

"Wot's it loik, then? Izit loik Lunnun?"

"Like London! Oh, no, it couldn't be less like London!" Nan's ploy worked; the child giggled at the idea of comparing the Congo with a metropolis, and she painted a vivid word-picture of the green jungles, teeming with birds and animals of all sorts; of the natives who came to her father and mother for medicines. "Mum and Da don't do what some of the others do — they went and talked to the magic men and showed them they weren't going to interfere in the magic work, and now whenever Mum and Da have a patient who thinks he's cursed, they call the magic man in to help, and when a magic man has someone that his magic can't help right away, he takes the patient to Mum and Da and they all put on feathers and Mum and Da give him White Medicine while the magic man burns his herbs and feathers and makes his chants, and everyone is happy. There haven't been any uprisings at our station for *ever* so long, and our magic men won't let anyone put black chickens at our door. One of them gave me Grey, and I wanted to bring her with me, but Mum said I shouldn't." Now the child sighed, and looked woeful again.

"Wot's a Grey?" Nan asked.

"She's a Polly, a grey parrot with the beautifullest red tail; the medicine man gave her to me when she was all prickles, he showed me how to feed her with mashed-up yams and things. She's *so* smart, she follows me about, and she can say, oh, hundreds of things. The

Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

medicine man said that she was to be my guardian and keep me from harm. But Mum was afraid the smoke in London would hurt her, and I couldn't bring her with me." Sarah looked up at the fat, stone bird on the gatepost above her. "That's why Mem'sab gave me *that* gargoyle, to be my guardian instead. We all have them, each child has her own, and that one's mine." She looked down again at Nan, and lowered her voice to a whisper. "Sometimes when I get lonesome, I come here and talk to her, and it's like talking to Grey."

Nan nodded her head, understanding. "Oi useta go an' talk t' a stachew in one'a the yards, 'til we 'adta move. It looked loik me grammum. Felt loik I was talkin' to 'er, I fair did." A footstep on the gravel path made Nan look up, and she jumped to see the tall man with the head-wrap standing there, as if he had come out of the thin air. She had not sensed his presence, and once again, even though he stood materially before her she *could not*. He took no notice of Nan, for which she was grateful; instead, he handed the basket he was carrying to Sarah Jane, and walked off without a word.

Sarah passed the basket to Nan; it was heavier this time, and Nan *thought* she smelled something like roasted meat. Oh, if *only* they'd given her the drippings from their beef! Her mouth watered at the thought.

"I hope you like these," Sarah said shyly, as Nan passed her the much-lighter empty. "Mem'sab says that if you'll keep coming back, I'm to talk to you and ask you about London; she says that's the best way to learn about things. She says otherwise, when I go out, I might get into trouble I don't understand."

Nan's eyes widened at the thought that the head of a school had said anything of the sort—but Sarah Jane hardly seemed like the type of child to lie. "All roit, I s'pose," she said dubiously. "If you'll be 'ere, so'll Oi."

The next day, faithful as the rising sun, Sarah was waiting with her basket, and Nan was invited to come inside the gate. She wouldn't venture any farther in than a bench in the garden, but as Sarah asked questions, she answered them as bluntly and plainly as she would any similar question asked by a child in her own neighborhood. Sarah learned about the dangers of the dark side of London first-hand — and oddly, although she nodded wisely and with clear understanding, they didn't seem to *frighten* her.

"Garn!" Nan said once, when Sarah absorbed the interesting fact that the opium den a few doors from where Nan and her mother had a room had pitched three dead men out into the street the night before. "Yer ain't never seen nothin' loik that!"

"You forget, Mum and Da have a hospital, and it's very dangerous where they are," Sarah replied matter-of-factly. "I've seen dead men, and dead women and even babies. When Nkumba came in clawed up by a lion, I helped bring water and bandages, while Mum and Da sewed him up. When there was a black-water fever, I saw lots of people die. It was horrid and sad, but I didn't fuss, because Nkumba and Da and Mum were worked nearly to bones and needed me to be good."

Nan's eyes widened again. "Wot else y'see?" she whispered, impressed in spite of herself.

After that, the two children traded stories of two very different sorts of jungles. Despite its dangers, Nan thought that Sarah's was the better of the two.

Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

She learned other things as well; that "Mem'sab" was a completely remarkable woman, for she had a Sikh, a Gurkha, two Moslems, two Buddhists, and assorted Hindus working in peace and harmony together — "and Mum said in her letter that it's easier to get leopards to herd sheep than that!" Mem'sab was by no means a fool; the Sikh and the Gurkha shared guard duty, patrolling the walls by day and night. One of the Hindu women was the "ayah", who took care of the smallest children; the rest of the motley assortment were servants and even teachers.

She heard many stories about the remarkable Grey, who really *did* act as Sarah's guardian, if Sarah was to be believed. Sarah described times when she had inadvertently gotten lost; she had called frantically for Grey, who was allowed to fly free, and the bird had come to her, leading her back to familiar paths. Grey had kept her from eating some pretty but poisonous berries by flying at her and nipping her fingers until she dropped them. Grey alerted the servants to the presence of snakes in the nursery, always making a patrol before she allowed Sarah to enter. And once, according to Sarah, when she had encountered a lion on the path, Grey had flown off and made sounds like a young gazelle in distress, attracting the lion's attention before it could scent Sarah. "She led it away, and didn't come back to me until it was too far away to bother coming back," the little girl claimed solemnly, "Grey is *very* clever." Nan didn't know whether to gape at her or laugh; she couldn't imagine how a mere bird could be intelligent enough to talk, much less act with purpose.

Nan had breath to laugh with, nowadays, thanks to baskets that held more than bread. The food she found in there, though distinctly odd, was always good, and she no longer felt out of breath and tired all the time. She had stopped wondering and worrying about why "Mem'sab" took such an interest in her, and simply accepted the gifts without question. They might stop at any moment; she accepted that without question, too. The only thing she couldn't accept so easily was the manservant's eerie mental silence.

"How is your mother?" Sarah asked, since yesterday Nan had confessed that Aggie been "on a tear" and had consumed, or so Nan feared, something stronger and more dangerous than gin.

Nan shook her head. "I dunno," she replied reluctantly. "Aggie didn' wake up when I went out. Tha's not roight, she us'lly at least wakes up t'foind out wha' I got. She don' half loik them baskets, 'cause it means I don' go beggin' as much."

"And if you don't beg money, she can't drink," Sarah observed shrewdly. "You hate begging, don't you?"

"Mostly I don' like gettin' kicked an' cursed at," Nan temporized. "It ain't loik I'm gettin' underfoot...."

But Sarah's questions were coming too near the bone, tonight, and Nan didn't want to have to deal with them. She got to her feet picked up her basket. "I gotter go," she said abruptly.

Sarah rose from her seat on the bench and gave Nan a penetrating look. Nan had the peculiar feeling that the child was looking at *her* thoughts, and deciding whether or not to press her further. "All right," Sarah said. "It *is* getting dark."

It wasn't, but Nan wasn't about to pass up the offer of a graceful exit. "'Tis, that," she said promptly, and squeezed through the narrow opening Karamjit had left in the gate.

But she had not gone four paces when two rough-looking men in shabby tweed jackets blocked her path. "You Nan Killian?" said one hoarsely. Then when Nan stared at him blankly, added, "Aggie Killian's girl?"

The answer was surprised out of her; she hadn't been expecting such a confrontation, and she hadn't yet managed to sort herself out. "Ye — es," she said slowly.

"Good," the first man grunted. "Yer Ma sent us; she's gone t' a new place, an' she wants us t'show y' the way."

Now, several thoughts flew through Nan's mind at that moment. The first was, that as they were paid up on the rent through the end of the week, she could not imagine Aggie ever vacating before the time was up. The second was, that even if Aggie *had* set up somewhere else, she would never have sent a pair of strangers to find Nan.

And third was that Aggie had turned to a more potent intoxicant than gin — which meant she would need a deal more money. And Aggie had only one thing left to sell.

Nan.

Their minds were such a roil that she couldn't "hear" any distinct thoughts, but it was obvious that they meant her no good.

"Wait a minnit —" Nan said, her voice trembling a little as she backed away from the two men, edging around them to get to the street. "Did'jer say Aggie *Killian's* gel? Me Ma ain't called Killian, yer got th' wrong gel —"

It was at that moment that one of the men lunged for her with a curse. He had his hands nearly on her, and would have gotten her, too, except for one bit of interference.

Sarah came shooting out of the gate like a little bullet. She body-slammed the fellow, going into the back of his knees and knocking him right off his feet. She danced out of the way as he fell in the nick of time, ran to Nan, and caught her hand, tugging her towards the street. "Run!" she commanded imperiously, and Nan ran.

The two of them scrabbled through the dark alleys and twisted streets without any idea where they were, only that they had to shake off their pursuers. Unfortunately, the time that Nan would have put into learning her new neighborhood like the back of her grimy little hand had been put into talking with Sarah, and before too long, even Nan was lost in the maze of dark, fetid streets. Then their luck ran out altogether, and they found themselves staring at the blank wall of a building, in a dead-end cul-de-sac.

They whirled around, hoping to escape before they were trapped, but it was already too late. The bulky silhouettes of the two men loomed against the fading light at the end of the street.

"'Oo's yer friend, ducky?" the first man purred. "Think she'd loik t'come with?"

To Nan's astonishment, Sarah stood straight and tall, and even stepped forward a pace. "I think you ought to go away and leave us alone," she said clearly. "You're going to find yourselves in a lot of trouble."

The talkative man laughed. "Them's big words from such a little gel," he mocked. "We ain't leavin' wi'out we collect what's ours, an' a bit more fer th' trouble yer caused."

Nan was petrified with fear, shaking in every limb, as Sarah stepped back, putting her back to the damp wall. As the first man touched Sarah's arm, she shrieked out a single word.

"Grey!"

As Sarah cried out the name of her pet, Nan let loose a wordless prayer for something, *anything*, to come to their rescue.

Something screamed behind the man; startled and distracted for a moment, he turned. For a moment, a fluttering shape obscured his face, and *he* screamed in pain. He shook his head, violently.

"Get it off!" he screamed at his partner. "*Get it off!*"

"Get what off?" the man said, bewildered. "There ain't nothin' there!"

The man clawed frantically at the front of his face, but whatever had attacked him had vanished without a trace. But not before leading more substantial help to the rescue.

Out of the dusk and the first wisps of fog, Karamjit and another swarthy man ran on noiseless feet. In their hands were cudgels which they used to good purpose on the two who opposed them. Nor did they waste any effort, clubbing the two senseless with a remarkable economy of motion.

Then, without a single word, each of the men scooped up a girl in his arms, and bore them back to the school. At that point, finding herself safe in the arms of an unlooked-for rescuer, Nan felt secure enough to break down into hysterical tears.

Nor was that the end of it; she found herself bundled up into the sacred precincts of the school itself, plunged into the first hot bath of her life, wrapped in a clean flannel gown, and put into a real bed. Sarah was in a similar bed beside her. As she sat there, numb, a plain-looking woman with beautiful eyes came and sat down on the foot of Sarah's bed, and looked from one to the other of them.

"Well," the lady said at last, "What have you two to say for yourselves?"

Nan couldn't manage anything, but that was all right, since Sarah wasn't about to let her get in a word anyway. The child jabbered like a monkey, a confused speech about Nan's mother, the men she'd sold Nan to, the virtue of Charity, the timely appearance of Grey, and a great deal more besides. The lady listened and nodded, and when Sarah ran down at last, she turned to Nan.

"I believe Sarah is right in one thing," she said gravely. "I believe we will have to keep you. Now, both of you — sleep."

And to Nan's surprise, she fell asleep immediately.

But that was not the end to the story. A month later, Sarah's mother arrived, with Grey in a cage. Nan had, by then, found a place where she could listen to what went on in the best parlor without being found, and she glued her ear to the crack in the pantry to listen when Sarah was taken into that hallowed room.

"— found Grey senseless beside her perch," Sarah's mother was saying. "I thought it was a fit, but the Shaman swore that Sarah was in trouble and the bird had gone to help. Grey awoke none the worse, and I would have thought nothing more of the incident, until your message arrived."

"And so you came, very wisely, bringing this remarkable bird." Mem'sab made chirping noises at the bird, and an odd little voice said, "Hello, bright eyes!"

Mem'sab chuckled. "How much of strangeness are you prepared to believe in, my dear?" she asked gently. "Would you believe me if I told you that I have seen this bird once before — fluttering and pecking at my window, then leading my men to rescue your child?"

"I can only answer with Hamlet," Sarah's mother said after a pause. "That there are more things in heaven and earth than I suspected."

"Good," Mem'sab replied decidedly. "Then I take it you are not here to remove Sarah from our midst."

"No," came the soft reply. "I came only to see that Sarah was well, and to ask if you would permit her pet to be with her."

"Gladly," Mem'sab said. "Though I might question which of the two was the pet!"

"Clever bird!" said Grey.

❄

MERCEDES LACKEY lives in Oklahoma with her husband Larry Dixon. Her hobbies include falconry and managing a diverse assortment of pets.

NICHOLAS JAINSCHIGG and his wife recently moved to Rhode Island from New York City. He's an aficionado of birds (especially parrots) and bats.

Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

The Bakery Men Don't See

A cookbook featuring more than sixty recipes, tips, and baking stories by sf pros and fans.

All proceeds donated to the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award, a new sf award for gender-bending sf & fantasy.

$10 per copy plus postage ($1 North America, $3 Other).

Make checks payable to:
SF3, Box 1624
Madison, WI
53701-1624

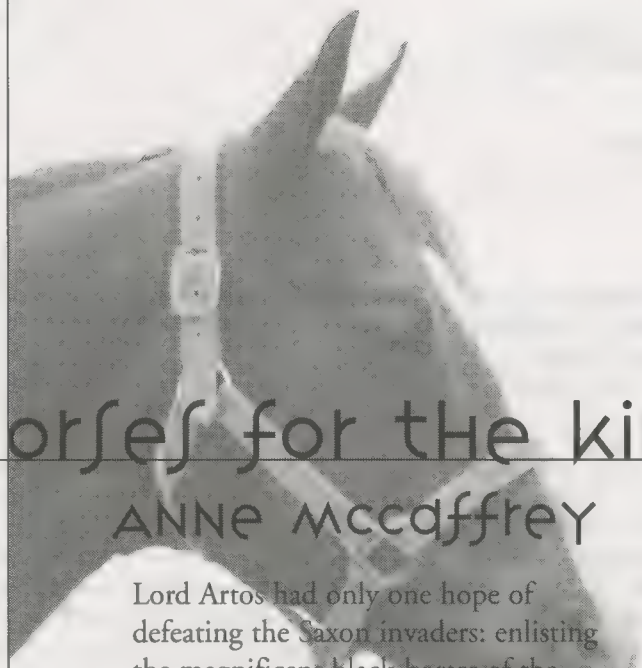
✦❁■▼❁▲I ✷❑❑●❄▲ ✦❄▲▼❄❖❁●

(THAT MEANS "FANTASY WORLDS FESTIVAL" IN MINAYARVISH)

Labor Day Weekend, 1998
Berkeley Marriott Hotel (smack dab on San Francisco Bay)
Writer Guest of Honor: Barbara Hambly

Please send sase for details to:
MZB Ltd., P.O. Box 72, Berkeley CA 94701, or check www.mzbfm.com.

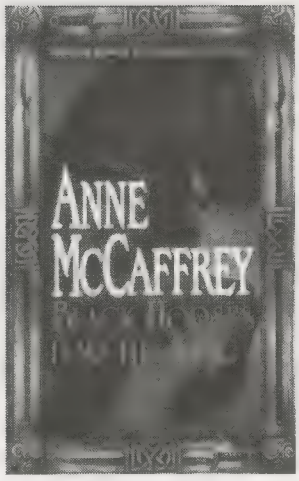
THE BESTSELLING CREATOR OF SCIENCE FICTION'S FAVORITE DRAGONS NOW GIVES EQUAL TIME TO FANTASY'S MOST FAMOUS KNIGHT!



black horses for the king

ANNE McCAFFREY

Lord Artos had only one hope of defeating the Saxon invaders: enlisting the magnificent black horses of the desert to carry his warriors into battle. But finding the glorious beasts meant a perilous journey...and demanded the assistance of Galwyn Varianus—the remarkable boy who would help Lord Artos to claim his throne as King Arthur! With all of the adventure and suspense of her Dragonriders of Pern novels, Anne McCaffrey brings an original historical fantasy to vivid life.



A Del Rey® Paperback

DEL REY
Stories That Define Imagination
A Division of The Ballantine Publishing Group
http://www.randomhouse.com/delrey/

Agent Problems

by J. G. Hemry

Artwork by Lynne Fahnestalk

The voice on the telephone was cold and very, very deep. "I want my money, McKenzie. I want it *now*."

I tried temporizing. "Look, Greg, it's tied up —"

"Shut up." The voice wasn't having any of it. "No more excuses. You have twenty-four hours to deliver my money. All of it. And I want it in gold."

Gold. In twenty-four hours. Maybe if I tried threatening him. "Greg, I can make life difficult for you. You'll never get published again if I spread the wrong word around."

Bad move. A long, hostile hiss whispered over the receiver. "If you want to talk difficult, I can easily surpass your puny threats, McKenzie. Twenty-four hours. After that, I'd make sure I was wearing something fireproof, not that it'll save you. And by the way, the name's Greganrian. Use it properly in the time you have left." A harsh click resounded and the line went dead.

I put down my own phone slowly, mind numb. Twenty-four hours wouldn't normally be a problem, even given the demand for payment in gold (which I should have expected). It was a problem, though, because I didn't have Greganrian's money, nor any way of raising the amount I needed. Technically, I'd never done anything illegal, given that the stuff had been sold in my name and I'd never signed a contract, but Greganrian was unlikely to be dissuaded by legal technicalities. I considered calling the police for protection, but dismissed that thought immediately. They'd just lock me up, probably, and Greganrian wouldn't have to chase me down: he'd simply fry me in my padded cell.

You can't push a rope, Dad used to say. Too bad he never told me you can't cheat a dragon indefinitely.

I sat in my office, watching the sun sinking toward the tops of the skyscrapers across the way. No ideas came to mind, no way of paying Greganrian, no way of escaping him when the money wasn't there tomorrow. Finally, I stood and headed for the door. I needed to talk to someone else, someone who wouldn't think I was either a loon or trying to pitch a new story idea. Somehow, I knew just who that someone should be.

Chrys was sitting at her usual place in the bar, slowly sipping an espresso and deflecting interested men as casually as a horse flicks away flies. I sat down beside her, safe from the death-ray glance. For some reason, she'd taken a shine to me a few months ago. Nothing sexual, more's the pity, because Chrys was something out of a man's dreams, but we'd been talking and drinking buddies ever since.

"What's up?" she asked crisply, gazing at me out of the corners of her blue eyes. "You look like death just called and told you not to make dinner plans for tomorrow."

"Good guess." I shuddered involuntarily and she turned to look at me closely.

"Let's get a booth," Chrys suggested, nodding her head toward an empty one in the back. Her golden hair waved softly as I followed obediently, the eyes of every man in the place tracking us with naked envy.

I slid in opposite her and tried a false grin. Chrys just shook her head. "No games, Harold. What's happened?"

"It's a long story."

"I've got all night."

"Okay." I took a deep breath, not sure where to start. "Look, when we met I was a successful writer. The Dragon's Eye series of stories made me a hot property. But as recently as a year ago, that wasn't the case. I hadn't made a sale in I don't remember how long. I was so desperate for money that I put an ad on the Net offering to edit other people's work for pay, to help them sell their stories."

Chrys eyed me reflectively. "You couldn't sell your own stories but you took money to edit other people's work by saying you'd help them sell?"

That stung a bit. "Putting it that way sounds bad. I was just trying to make a buck, and maybe I helped a few people."

"One of them after you now?" she asked.

"Oh, no." My body shook again, and I leaned back hard against the seat to stifle the motion. "After I'd been doing that for a short time, I got a funny offer over the Net. This guy told me he'd written some stuff, but he couldn't sell it. Not because it wasn't good, but because he wanted to remain anonymous. Even a pen name was too risky, he said. He told me he wanted me to sell the

stuff under my name, but keep only a normal agent's commission. I'd get money and be regarded as successful, and he'd get more money than me. Everybody would win."

Chrys ran one fingertip around the rim of her demitasse. "So you didn't write any of the Dragon's Eye stories? This other guy really did?"

"Yeah." Something about the way she said it made that sound bad, too. "He sent me the stories via modem, and I sent them out as my own work. We did a few stories that way, made a few sales, and eventually he confided his secret to me."

"And what was that?"

I licked my lips. "He was a dragon. A real dragon. That's why the stories are so good. He's just writing from experience."

"Uh huh." To my surprise, Chrys just took the news in stride. "But now he wants you dead?" I nodded. "Why?"

"Well, um... he wants all the money I owe him."

"So give it to him."

"I can't. I ... sort of spent it."

She cocked one eyebrow at me. "Sort of spent it?"

I was sweating a little now. "I've been playing the commodities market. A sure thing, I thought. Well, I lost a lot. I needed Greg's (he's the dragon) money to cover my losses. I figured with Greg's share I'd be able to recoup them and turn a nice profit. I'd even give him a little extra to make up for using his money without telling him."

"Nice of you," Chrys stated tonelessly. "I take it you didn't recoup your losses?"

"Nah. It's all gone." I stared helplessly at the table for a moment, then back into her eyes. "Why are you believing this?"

She laughed softly, and I felt a quiver run along my spine that had nothing to do with fear of dragons. "Harold, dear, I believe it because of who I am. Haven't you ever wondered why I got to know you when I shoot every other man down in flames?"

The question floored me. "Well, I'm a successful author."

Chrys laughed again. "That wasn't it. I'm a member of the Order of Valkyr."

"The Order ...?"

"We kill dragons." She sipped at her espresso again, as matter of fact as if she'd just said she was an advertising executive. "The Order's been doing that for millennia. Dragons began hiding

Artwork by Lynne Fahnestalk

centuries ago in order to survive as humanity's strength waxed, so we hid ourselves, too. When your stories appeared, we recognized them as the work of a real dragon. At first, we thought that was you, but once I met you I knew that wasn't the case. We knew you had to have a dragon partner, though, so we just waited for the inevitable falling -out."

I was having trouble absorbing everything, but I focused on her last statement. "Inevitable? Why inevitable? If I hadn't, uh, diverted Greg's money he'd still be happy."

She shook her head. "No. Dragons are very greedy. This one got into writing in order to become rich, and sooner or later would have demanded more money from you no matter how much you'd paid him."

"Wait a minute. The dragon became a writer so he'd become rich?"

Chrys shrugged. "Just because dragons are very greedy doesn't mean they're also very intelligent. Unfortunately for you, even a dragon dumb enough to try to make a fortune as a writer is still plenty smart enough to track you down and rip you apart."

The tremor came back, this time in my right hand. I held it still with my left and tried to smile at her. "But you said you kill dragons."

She smiled back, an event that would make strong men weak. "So we do, and I shall kill this one. Its name is not really Greg, is it?"

"No, it's Greganrian."

"Greganrian," she repeated, rolling the word around her mouth. "Good. But if I'm to kill this dragon, you must pay a price."

My momentary hope flagged. "Pay? I'm tapped out, Chrys. If I had money I'd give it to Greganrian."

"I didn't mention money, did I?" She smiled again, languorously, full lips slighted parted, eyes hooded as they smoldered in my direction. "The payment for my labors isn't monetary."

Memory of the price maidens usually paid knights for rescue from dragons suddenly returned to me. Could it be that a man would pay the same price if rescued by a maiden? Why not? "Well, I —"

"I assure you," she purred, "the price I ask is one a man such as yourself is, say we shall, well-fitted to pay."

"It's a deal!" I gasped.

She straightened, but kept me pinned under those eyes. "We have a deal? You will pay my price?"

"Yeah, sure. When?"

"After the dragon is dead," she replied crisply. The seductress of a moment before had vanished, replaced by the Chrys I'd always seen before. "It is not without risk, but it won't be the first dragon I've slain, either. When will the dragon come for you?"

I checked my watch. "He said twenty-four hours, so that'd be about three tomorrow."

"Excellent. Meet me at two tomorrow in this field." She passed me a set of directions. "We need to do this in an isolated area. I don't want any other dragons showing up."

"I don't understand." I stared at the directions blankly. "There's lots of dragons around?"

"A great many, yes."

"Why haven't I ever seen any?"

Her eyes twinkled with amusement. "You shall learn that tomorrow."

The field was isolated, all right. Far outside town, and surrounded by trees. I stood there as the minutes crawled by, wondering how far I'd be able to run before Greganrian caught me if it turned out Chrys had been playing a really nasty practical joke on me and didn't plan on showing up. Maybe she thought I'd been pulling her leg and had played along. Maybe I was as good as dead now.

I needn't have worried. Just before two o'clock she rode into the clearing astride a beast that had the body of a lion, and the head and wings of an eagle. "A griffin?" I gasped, as she dismounted.

"Of course," she replied sharply. "Did you expect me to fight a dragon on horseback? That would be ridiculous."

The griffin eyed me coldly and I looked away fast. "You —" Chrys's garb finally registered on me and I stood there in shock for a moment. She was wearing fine chain mail that covered her upper body and the front of her leather trousers. Large leather gloves with mailed uppers gripped a shield almost as big as her body and a wicked-looking lance that must have been fifteen feet long. A winged helmet rested on her head, covering that golden hair. "The Order of Valkyr. I didn't get it."

"You will," she replied enigmatically. "I'll hide in the woods on my steed until the dragon gets here. After that, just try to stay out of the way. Understand?"

I nodded mutely and she mounted again. I watched the ungainly creature wobble into the woods, then sat down and stared at the ground, trying not to think. I'd only seen Greganrian once, and that'd been enough. He was as big and nasty as you'd imagine a dragon to be, and I wasn't at all sure that a gorgeous babe on a mythical creature could take him out.

Time slipped by without my realizing it. My first notice that Greganrian had arrived was when a shadow fell over me. I looked up, and turned white. He was bigger and nastier than I remembered, and gazing at me hungrily. "Any last requests, thief?" he hissed.

Before I could answer there was a thunder of wings. Greganrian and I both looked toward the sound and saw Chrys mounted on her griffin, hovering over the field. Awkward on land, the beast was all grace and strength while airborne. "Valkyr!" the dragon cried, then vanished like a burst soap bubble.

I was still looking around in wonder when Chrys spoke. "Greganrian, Greganrian," she chanted. "I know your name, Greganrian." At the third iteration of his name, the dragon reappeared nearby, so mad that flames were flickering from his muzzle.

"Witch!" Greganrian shouted. "I shall devour you and then this thief. Humans are my meat!"

"Not this day, slayer-of-children," Chrys taunted, then urged her griffin forward.

Greganrian howled and spat flame, but the griffin flicked aside from the deadly vomit. I heard a whooshing sound and hit the ground just before the dragon's tail whipped through the space I'd occupied, passing inches above my back. Greganrian returned his attention to Chrys, but the moment spent attacking me was his undoing. The griffin, far above the field, suddenly tucked wings and legs in and dropped like a bullet toward the dragon. They hit like a bolt from heaven, Chrys' lance driving most of its length into Greganrian's chest, then the griffin spun madly away, pulling his rider out of reach of the dragon's death throes.

Chrys landed her griffin not far from me, and walked my way, removing her helmet and wiping her forehead with the palm of one glove. "A good battle,"

she remarked. "And one less dragon to bedevil humanity. Not a bad day's work, but there's one thing yet to do."

"One thing?" I asked stupidly.

"My price," she reminded me archly.

"Oh." I grinned and looked down at the grass. "Is here okay?"

"No," she answered. "We're going somewhere else." I looked up again just in time to see her mailed fist heading straight for my face.

A gush of water hit me and I awoke, my head full of pain. I was face down on some sort of marble pavement, and by the feel of the area around my cheek I was sporting a black eye. Levering myself up, I stood shakily and found Chrys gazing at me in amusement as she sat down a bucket. "What's the big idea?" I gasped.

"My price, which you agreed to pay," she responded, tossing a rake at me.

I caught the implement before it did further damage to my face and alternated stares between her and the rake. "Huh? I thought your price was... I mean, you and me would, uh..."

She laughed merrily. "Too bad you didn't ask before agreeing. I only told you the price was one you were well-fitted for." She pointed a mail-clad arm, and I followed it to see a long, low structure with numerous broad doorways. "The griffin stables. They'll be your home for a while. It's hard to find people willing to clean them."

"Clean stables?" I glared at her. "That's your price? How's that fit me?"

She arched an eyebrow at me. "By your own admission, you are both an inept editor-for-hire and a crooked agent. I'd say laboring in a dung heap is right up your alley."

A sick certainty settled across me. "When you're not a Valkyr, you're a writer, aren't you?"

Chrys smiled at me bright and cold as an ice shelf. "Yes. Unpublished."

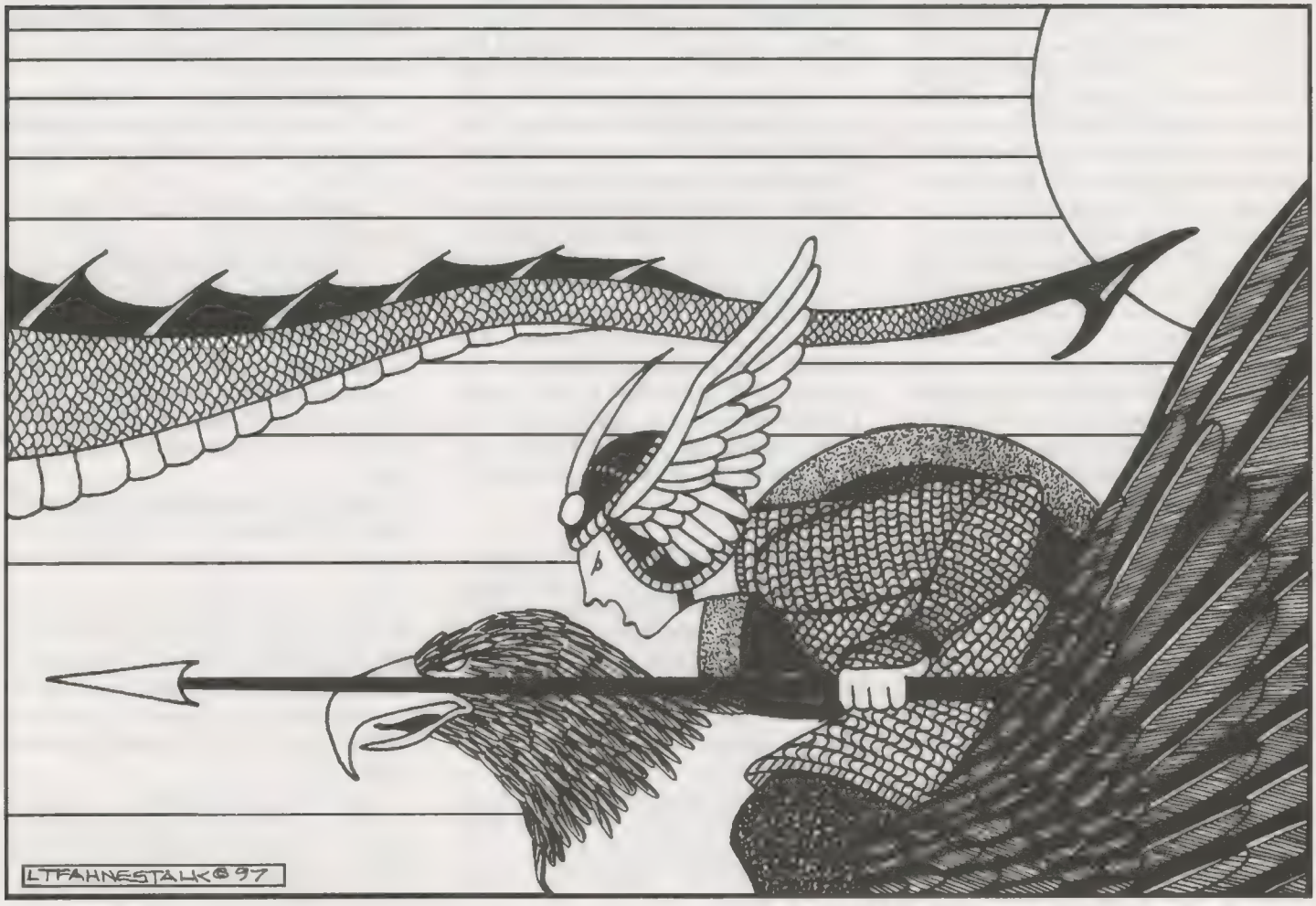
There are worse things in life than mucking out griffin stables, I guess. Like being a snack for a dragon. I have to tell you, though, that nothing smells as awful as griffin dung. The old hands in the stable tell me you start to get used it after the first ten years, however, and I'll only have ten more years to go after that.

❄

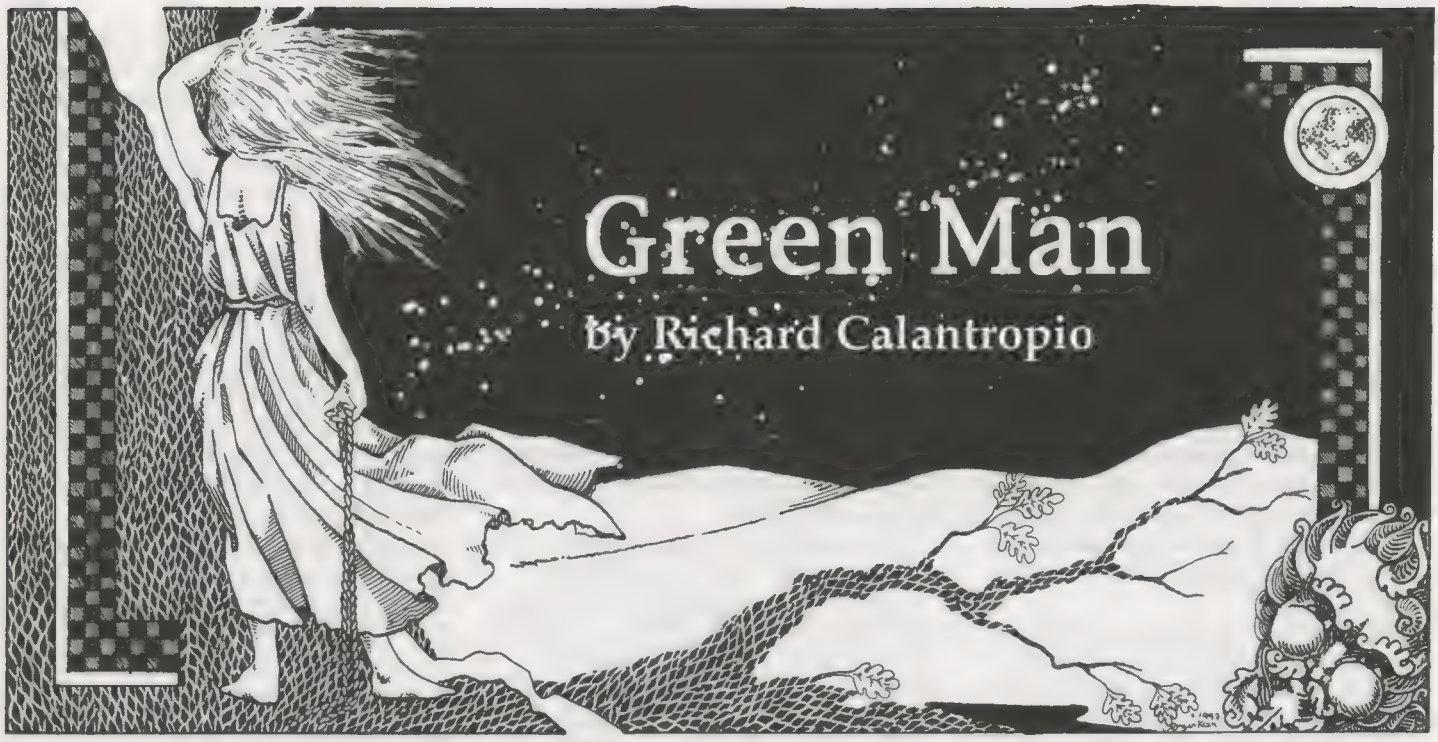
John G. Hemry served in the Navy for 17 years. He retired as a Lieutenant Commander in 1995 after duty on USS SPRUANCE, and with the Defense Intelligence Agency, Navy Anti-Terrorist Center, Commander Amphibious Squadron Five, the Naval Operational Intelligence Center, and with Chief of Naval Operations staff as Special Technical Operations Officer.

Since leaving the Navy he has been working out of his home, writing and taking care of his two children with his wife Sharrill, who works for the Navy as an analyst and is a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy Reserve. His hobbies include history and travel.

Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk has been working as a professional artist for over fifteen years. She is a two-time recipient of the Canadian Aurora Award for Artistic Achievement. Her artwork has appeared in numerous publications and is now included on the CD-ROM "Atlantis to the Stars". Lynne lives near Vancouver, B.C., with the lovely and talented Steve Fahnestalk (who sends us Lynne's art electronically now).



Artwork by Lynne Fahnestalk



Green Man

by Richard Calantropio

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

Phoebe, the miller's daughter, stood in the dappled moonlight beneath the spreading branches of the old oak. Her Jimmy was gone, but she knew she could join him tonight if she chose to. The tree had said so, and the tree was very old. The courting songs of crickets and spring peepers filled the countryside, but not here, not under the tree. Here, the night was still. In the soft spring darkness, the leaves of the oak were a silvery gray and they rustled quietly in some unfelt breeze. It was a lovely, tranquil place. There was something annoying around her neck. With a quick jerk, she snapped the offending chain and dropped the small amulet to the ground. There, that was much better. She lightly stepped upon one of the old tree's huge branches that bent all the way to the ground. She was wearing her softest kid slippers and her thin nightgown billowed out behind her as she skipped nimbly up the broad branch. How friendly the old tree was. She could feel its comforting presence and knew it would never let her fall. She stopped when she could glimpse the fen through the branches and let down her long, flaxen hair so her Jimmy would recognize her. He had always said there was none so fine in all the world. Hitching up her nightgown, she sat astride the branch and peered out through the leaves. Now she could make out the line of hills beyond the fen, a darker smudge against the night horizon. And beyond those hills, she knew, lay the sea. She even thought she could taste its briny tang on the cool air, though she knew it was much too far away. Humming to herself, she languidly unwrapped the long cord from around her waist and knotted it fast to the branch. "Ah, Jim boy, I'm sorry I've been so long." The words died in the quiet of the night. She was careful to tuck the noose under her long hair. Strange, the leaves stirred all around her but there was no breeze. Closing her eyes, she could see him now, beckoning to her. "Jimmy," she whispered and slid off the branch. There was a short fall through moonlit air and then the slow creaking of the branch. It did not creak for very long; Phoebe had been a slender girl. The leaves rustled again, a soft, hissing sigh of contentment. It had been almost too long.

Angus slammed a callused fist down on the bar as Tom set his second pint of ale before him. "Never again, Tom. I swear to you, Phoebe was the last."

Tom motioned him to lower his voice, although the only other customer, a heavily cloaked stranger in a chair by the fire, seemed to be leaning against the wall asleep.

"I'm sorry," Angus went on, dropping his voice. "It's just that little Phoebe was special to me. She was like my own, my own." Angus broke, tears streaming from his eyes, he lowered his head and cradled it in his hands.

Tom Bothy put a hand out and squeezed his old friend's shoulder. "I know Angus, I know. She was special to all of us. It just goes to show, we never really know ...."

Angus' head came up. He flung Tom's hand away. "Ah don't give me that prattle. We know why, we all know very well."

"You're not goin' to go on about the tree again are you?"

"I've been a woodcutter almost all of my sixty years." The cloaked stranger stirred at his words. "And never once have I set axe to a living tree. It would be like cuttin' out my own heart. But I could cut that evil thing down. I could cut it down and burn it where it falls. It's not even fit firewood for decent folk."

Angus' voice was growing loud again and the stranger was stirring in his chair. "It's a tree, Angus, a tree," Tom said.

Angus took a deep drink and set down his mug. "How many times has this happened? How many times more does it have to happen before we do what needs to be done? It's an evil thing, it calls people to take their own lives."

"Those old tales about evil spirits don't mean much to people anymore, Angus. Times are changin'," Tom said with a shrug.

"No squirrels."

"What?"

"It's an oak tree. Have you ever seen an oak tree without at least one squirrel? Or a bird? Or any other living thing for that matter? That tree is death, and all the wild creatures know it. Well, never mind. Phoebe was the last. There will be no more. I'll be takin' it down today."

Tom shook his head slowly. "Angus, Angus, if you really believe all this, can you tell me why you haven't cut it down long ago? I mean your own Gwyneth ...." He stopped. His eyes looked away, then back at Angus. "I'm sorry, Angus. I didn't mean to ..."

Angus looked tired. "It's all right. Gwyneth took her own life, we both know it. It was a terrible thing and I've had to live with it for these many years. But what I've never told anyone is that it was my Gwyneth who told me about the tree."

"Go on now. She was grieving over the baby."

"Aye, aye, the baby was the start of it." His voice dropped to a whisper. "But afterward ... afterward she told me she could hear it in the dead hours of the night. 'I lie there awake, Angus,' she said, 'and I hear your breathin' and I hear the tree callin', so sweet and peaceful, and I don't know which is more dear to me. It's like I have to choose even though I don't want to.' But me, I didn't believe her."

The stranger had risen from his chair and was approaching the bar carrying a leather pack.

"I just didn't understand you see. 'You'll grow out of it,' I told her. 'We can have another baby,' I said. As if any man could understand what it's like to carry a child all those months and then lose it at birth like that." He shook his head. "How foolish I was. So one night she made her choice." He got off his stool and tapped his finger on the bar. "Makes no never mind whether or not you believe. Today I make an end to it." He turned to go. "Come, Silkie, let's be off." The old border collie at his feet rose to follow him.

"Yer goin' to fail, woodcutter." The low, urgent voice belonged to the stranger. "Because you don't know what you're about and you don't know the cost." He came forward now, shadow green cloak thrown back. His black hair, long and thick, hung over his forehead to his eyebrows and cascaded down past his shoulders. It merged with a beard so full that what could be seen of his face was limited to a hawklike nose, full lips and a remarkable pair of deep green eyes.

"And who are you that you know so much about my business?" asked Angus.

The stranger set his pack on the bar. "Let us just say I know *you*, Angus, and I know what you need." His smile was wide and full.

"And what I need has a price, I take it?"

"Everything has a cost, friend," he sighed. "That is the way of life. The problem is that men always think cost is always to be reckoned in gold."

Angus waved a deprecating hand at the stranger. "Go on with you. Me and Silkie here, we've all we require, thank you." The dog raised his head at the sound of his name and the stranger bent to pet him. "I wouldna' do that. Like myself, he's getting old and a mite chary of strangers."

The dog's eyes were closed in obvious pleasure as the stranger stroked its head, his tone deep and hypnotic. "Good dog then, Silkie. True to your own good nature, aren't you? Yes, yes, that's a fine lad."

"You've a way with animals then?" asked Angus, curiosity aroused.

"I think they just sense I mean them no harm."

"You said I would fail ... why?"

"The tree's spirit, it isn't evil, it's a lie. It has become untrue to its own nature and must be replaced. And, my friend, the cost will be a heavy one."

"No price would be too great to rid us of this thing."

"Careful, Angus," said Tom.

"Heed your friend's words. Everyone is willing to pay a king's ransom when all they possess is a crofter's hut.

"And you, you have what we need to destroy this thing?"

"To dispossess it you will need these." From out of his pack he drew a rolled-up silk. He unrolled it on the bar and revealed three black steel rods. They glistened in the lamplight, and when Angus picked one up it numbed his hand with cold.

"Lord, they're as cold as death," he marveled. "And the points, they're like needles. How would these be used?"

The stranger whispered, "They draw the very lightning from the clouds."

Angus understood instantly. "How much will you take for them?"

The stranger rolled the rods back in

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

their cloth and put them into his pack. "There it is, always men think of gold." He shook his head. "Nay, come to me when you know the true cost and are willin' to pay." He started for the door.

"Are you daft, man, how can I know the cost?" Angus snapped.

"You will know it. Come to me when you do." He stopped in the open doorway. "If you're still alive." He stamped out heavily, caked mud and leaves dropping from his shabby boots onto the floor.

It was warm and muggy and Angus stopped to mop his brow. "Och, lad, I wish I could have made sense of the stranger's words. He was an odd one, eh Silkie?" The dog barked amiably in reply as they walked along the dusty road. "Drawing down the lightning, now that would be somethin' to see. But, my way will do. It will have to." Puffing slightly, he inventoried the gear in his cart. It was a huge tree and he had spent a good deal of time thinking about what he would need to accomplish the task. He had axes, saws, rope, tackle, wedges and, should something go wrong, he had pitch, tinder and a firepot. He'd burn it standing if he had to.

"Come along, lad. We're almost there. There's not much you can do but keep me company, but it'll do, lad. On a day like this, it'll do." Silkie trotted obediently alongside.

He was very tired when he reached the tree. He hoped he wouldn't have to try to burn it; it looked like a spring thunderstorm was brewing up. So warm, so humid. For the first time in years he truly felt old and it was a considerable burden. As he surveyed the tree and began sorting through his equipment, a lassitude grew on him. His thoughts strayed back to Gwyneth. He needed to rest before he tackled this job.

He sat down hard in the dusty road. "Och, I'm worn down, Silkie. I've stayed too long when there's nothing left for me. Life's hard, isn't it, old friend? Very, very hard. Why am I doing this, lad? It's pointless. Old Tom's right. It's nought but a tree like any other." He picked up the rope. "In truth, it's a more handsome tree than most." He got to his feet and pushed the cart under a branch. He knew he was forgetting something, but what was it? He climbed up into the cart and listlessly tossed one end of the rope over the branch. Well whatever it was, it didn't matter, nothing did. "I'm too old, lad, too tired. It's time for me to be with Gwyneth again."

Suddenly, as if on some command outside the range of human hearing, Silkie began barking loudly, but his master seemed not to hear. In desperation, Silkie bounded onto the end of the cart, overturning it. Dog, man and tools spilled noisily into the road.

Confused, sitting in the road with Silkie licking his face, Angus decided the job was too big for an old man.

Later, at home, he found himself wondering why he had gotten all these tools together. "Seems like I'm in my dotage, lad. For the life of me I don't remember why I got my rig out." He felt dazed, his head was muddled. "I must have had somethin' big in mind. But now, I just don't know what it was."

Something in the cart glittered. "What's this?" It was an amulet on a fine silver chain. "I must have picked it up with my tools." The dog's tail thumped the floor. It was an acorn delicately carved with a man's face. The face looked as though it were emerging from a leafy background. The sharp features, rampant beard, hair and leaves all flowed one into the other so that it was hard to tell where man left off and tree began. A Green Man it was called, Robin of the Wood, Robin Goodfellow, the protective spirit of the forest. He knew this particular one well for he had carved it himself many years ago when his eyes were still sharp. He had given it to Gwyneth on their wedding day and then after she had ... Well, then he had kept it locked away for a long time and had finally given it to Phoebe on her fourteenth birthday. He was fingering the small carved image when it all came flooding back, slowly at first, then like a tide building, swelling and running, and finally, he remembered. The tree, the blasted tree. He went to one knee and hugged the dog, burying his face in its thick coat, tears stinging his eyes. "Thank you, old friend." He brushed the tears away with the back of his hand. "It's worse than I thought, far worse. The cursed thing casts a powerful glamour." Angus heard the distant rumble of thunder across the fen. The wind, rising out of the west, was sighing under the eaves of his cottage. A big storm was coming, coming out of the sea. He threaded a leather thong through the Green Man and put it around his own neck. "Let's be off, laddie, I know what I've got to do. It'll mean another trip to town and it'll be dark when we get back, but I think we'll have just enough time before the storm."

He found the stranger camped just at the edge of the wood on the way to town. It was only a small lean-to with no fire. As Angus approached, the stranger emerged silently from the shrubs nearby.

"You didn't care for Tom's, then?" asked Angus.

"Inns are fine in their way, but I don't care for bein' indoors."

"I don't like bein' at a disadvantage. You know my name, will you tell me yours, then?"

"Come now, Angus, I think you know me. I think you know me quite well."

Angus looked closely at him in the growing twilight. "Aye ... aye, I think I do. You were there then?"

"I was there." They strolled to the stranger's lean-to.

"Could you not help?"

"I couldn't get that close. It knows me, you see. Your dog, though, he helped well enough."

"That he did. Your doin'?"

"Only to call out a warnin'. The rest he thought of himself. He's a good dog, that one." He got the pack out of the lean-to.

"Aye, he's all of that. Will he ...?"

The stranger gave a small smile. "He'll be fine, Angus. And the cost, Angus? Do you know the cost?" he asked softly.

"Aye, I do, and I'm willin' to pay." He looked directly into the stranger's green eyes.

"I thought you might be. You're a good man, Angus, you've a good heart. That's why I chose you." He saw Angus' expression and laughed softly. "Don't look so surprised, man. How did you think these things were done? Besides, you could always have refused."

"Could I?"

He handed the silken package to Angus. "Come, I'll walk with you a ways and tell you what you must do."

The sun was down now and he stood in his cottage examining the rods by candlelight. The metal had come from the stars, the stranger had said. That's why it sucked the warmth out of your hands. Angus knew he must use all three and that he must use them while the coming storm was in full fury. He

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

put the stakes in a pack along with one of his sledgehammers and turned to Silkie. "Well, lad, I'm off. I'm sorry but this is one trip you won't be joining me on. I've left word with Bill." He stroked the old dog's head. "He's a good friend and he'll be by in the mornin'. You'll be livin' with him from now on. Goodbye, old friend. If the old tales be true, maybe we'll meet again." Silkie whined softly as his master left, closing the door behind him.

The rain was just starting to fall as he approached the tree. The poor light shed by his lantern was only just enough and barely penetrated the gloom beneath the heavy branches. Flickers of lightning briefly lit the starless sky and fat raindrops spattered softly, kicking up puffs of dry dust. He was alert for the tree's glamour and waited for it to start as he advanced under the overhanging branches. Nothing was happening; the tree seemed to be allowing his approach. It couldn't read minds or it would be trying to stop him. He was conscious of the amulet against his skin. Perhaps the thing sensed that Angus didn't expect to go home again and was mistaking his resignation for despair. He touched the amulet, then began climbing the stout, wet branches that led to the tree's heart. The storm was rising in intensity. The wind's low moan was becoming a wail and the rain was coming in driving sheets. He climbed as high as he dared and unslung the pack from his back.

"Here's a good spot for the first one." He drove the cold iron rod deep into the wood with three powerful hammer strokes. It seemed to him that the tree's branches were whipping about more than the wind would allow. "Gettin' a bit nervou, are you now?" He raised his voice above the wind. "Beginnin' to feel that somethin' might be amiss?" He crossed as quickly as he could to the branch where so many lives had ended. "Here, I think, for number two," he said as he savagely hammered the wicked point of star metal into the branch. The wind shrieked and he was nearly thrown off his wildly pitching perch.

"Steady, steady. I may be dyin' this night but not by you, you hateful thing." The third stroke drove the rod home. Lightning was striking the woods around now, the air ringing with its horrific blows. Soaked through, his body was suddenly racked with shuddering chills. As he waited for them to pass, he wiped the rain from his eyes. He moved to his last position high in the center of the tree and smiled. Old Silkie will be sore afraid by now, he never did like the thunder.

The tree was writhing and twisting violently now, the branches groaning and creaking like some deep primeval voice. And it seemed to Angus that now there was a note of fear and apprehension in that voice. Cautiously, he made his way up the center of the tree. Finding a way up was no problem, there were plenty of branches to choose from, but now the tree was fighting back. Time and again he was jolted so hard that he had to grab the rain-slicked trunk with both hands to keep from being thrown off. He had managed to hold on, but his strength was waning rapidly, like the last guttering of a dying candle, and his reserves were already spent. He stood on a large bough and leaned, exhausted, against the

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

trunk, face pressed to the rough bark. Soon it would be too late. Soon the storm would be past, sweeping inland to its own eventual death. I've got to get this last one in. Three, it must be three. The tree twisted and shook and Angus's feet shot out from under him. His chest struck the branch hard and the air left his lungs in a painful grunt. Holding on with both arms he tried desperately to haul himself back onto the branch. There was no strength left. Another shake, and the hammer slipped from his wet fingers, vanishing into the gloom below. He cried out in rage and frustration, feet kicking wildly but finding no purchase. Right, left, two more lurching twists and Angus slid further off the branch. Hanging by one arm, all endurance gone, he extended the remaining rod up into the storm and cried out in desperation, "For Gwyneth, for Phoebe and for — the — Green — Man!" He drove the rod down with all the strength he had left. The point found a rotten spot and the cold metal bit deeply. For just an instant, the storm paused as if in a gigantic inhalation. Then a three-pronged bolt of lightning struck the rods simultaneously with a terrifying concussion. In the cottage, Silkie stood by the window and began to howl. The hanging branch, its sap superheated to an impossible temperature, was totally vaporized.

Angus knew only a brief, blinding flash and then soft whiteness seemed to engulf him. He felt himself thinning to nothing, yet somehow he knew that this was not true death. Then, all at once, he felt his body growing substantial, strong and powerful. He heard the Green Man's voice. "You've done well, man. Live a long life." He still lived.

Tom stood looking at the tree in the sunrise. The hanging branch was utterly gone. Nothing remained except a charred place on the trunk. The rest of the tree seemed unharmed and, as he watched, a flock of small birds flew into the branches chirping noisily. He had stopped at the cottage for Silkie, and the old collie ran ahead of him now, up to the base of the tree. As Tom approached, Silkie barked excitedly. The old tree's leaves quivered and rustled, though Tom felt no breeze. Then Silkie turned round several times and curled up contentedly beneath the tree. Tom reached up for something hanging from a branch and saw it was one of those old-fashioned amulets, a Green Man the old-timers called them. ❋

Richard Calantropio writes: "I work as a Senior Technician for a large corporation in the Bay Area. I live with my wife and fifteen year old daughter. I have always been a voracious reader of fantasy and science fiction and horror as well as history, mythology and comparative religion. When not writing, I do volunteer wildlife rehabilitation for Wildlife Rescue Inc. I have an extended family that includes two dogs, several birds, and whatever 'familiars' pass through my care during the year. This is my first sale."

Margaret Organ-Kean got married this past summer. She works as a tech writer and systems analyst in Seattle, in addition to her artwork assignments from *Cricket*, *MZBFM*, and Wizards of the Coast (where she illustrated cards in the MAGIC deck, and was the artist for all the cards in The Great Dalmuti). The art director strongly suspects that the spaniel drawn on page 21 is based on one living at her parents'.

Exterminator

by Cynthia Mc Quillin

I really like being an exterminator, I make a decent living, the work varies and, in an odd sort of way, it makes me feel like a hero. You know, like the knight on the white horse charging in to slay the monster and save the helpless villagers. I guess you could trace my penchant for heroic delusion back to my early high school years, which were spent chasing down dark alleyways and back streets with Bernie Levine. We were Dr. Van Helsing and Jonathan Harker hot on the trail of the notorious count, or a pair of brilliant young scientists out to save the world from the giant mutant cockroaches.

I can't tell you how many Saturdays Bernie and I spent driving out to Tonopah in Dad's old pickup, to while away an afternoon in the cool, dusty darkness of the old movie house. Consuming unhealthy quantities of candy, popcorn, and soda, we watched breathlessly as each victim fell to the ravages of one fiend or another, always cheering when the fearless monster hunter laid the dastards low. Yeah, there was *Godzilla*, *King Kong*, *Them*, *The Wolf Man*, and *Dracula*, he was the best.

I really loved vampire flicks, all those beautiful women wandering around in nightgowns or low-cut dresses. For a fourteen-year-old boy from a small town in Nevada, that was pretty hot stuff. Anyway, to Bernie and me, Lathrop Wells after dark was a horror-film wonderland.

Uncomfortably near the Nevada Nuclear Test Site, the town had enjoyed a remarkable but short-lived prosperity back in the early Sixties. More recently it had declined into a kind of comfortable obscurity, but it was a nice place to live, if you didn't mind the heat.

I'm the only exterminator in Nye County, so I know most everyone, at least in passing, and I hear most of the gossip. In general, life in Lathrop Wells had always been pleasant, if predictable. But all that changed last June. I'll never forget that first Monday. I got up at seven, the air was clear and the morning chill had already burned off, which meant that we were in for a mighty hot afternoon.

I'd just taken a sip of coffee, when the headline of the *Tonopah Daily* caught my eye. BODY FOUND DRAINED OF BLOOD. Picking up the paper, I scanned quickly down the column avidly soaking in the details of our first ever local murder mystery.

Shelly Cooper had lived her whole life in Lathrop Wells. An attractive woman of about thirty, she worked at the Three Ponies Cafe most evenings. Tony Cigliera, the owner of the Three Ponies, had discovered her lifeless body Sunday night, when he went to empty the trash after closing. Poor Tony, he'd been sweet on Shelly as long as I could remember.

The police were stumped and Doc Martin had been called in from Tonopah to do the autopsy. According to the Doc, whoever or whatever attacked Shelly probably hadn't been too big, but had to have been pretty strong. Her windpipe had been crushed and she was short several pints of blood.

I pushed my plate away, appetite suddenly gone. Shelly had been a real sweetheart of a waitress, always quick with a smile or a wisecrack, and she'd served me meatloaf just last Saturday night.

According to Doc Martin, she'd died earlier that evening, around eight or eight thirty. Sheriff Purvis stated that Shelly's assailant had left no clue to his identity and that very little blood had been found at the scene. This indicated, he explained, that the actual killing had taken place somewhere else and her body dumped there afterwards, which was consistent with the pattern of other cult-related activities that had

Artwork by Kaja Foglio

occurred in the area.

Cult-related activities have been Elmo's obsession ever since that rash of cattle mutilations started last year. But the stab wound at the base of her throat and lack of blood *were* reminiscent of the earlier incidents, so maybe he had something.

Doc Martin had been overheard saying that the ragged hole looked more like a giant bite than a knife wound, leastwise any knife wound he'd ever seen. But when asked to comment further, he refused to make any kind of official statement till after the autopsy was complete.

The whole thing sounded like an episode from that *Night Stalker* series that was on TV a few years back. And that got me thinking about vampires. But I wasn't a kid anymore, and that really *was* too ridiculous to consider. Besides, I didn't have time for nonsense like that, I had to get over to the Grover place and take care of a scorpion problem they were having.

Minnie Bower was a quiet, forty-seven-year-old spinster, who had nothing in life but a small annuity left by her father, and her poodle, Bentley. She'd spent her entire life in Lathrop Wells, and aside from her weekly trip to the grocery store and walking Bentley each evening, kept pretty much to herself. I didn't really know her, except to say, "Hello," but it still hit too close to home when she met the same fate as Shelly only a week later.

The railway worker who discovered her body around six p.m. said he'd stopped to check out what looked like a pile of rags lying against the hurricane fence near the abandoned shipping warehouse. The edge of the train yard was only a few blocks from Minnie's house, and along the route she usually took with Bentley each evening. Once again there had been very little blood found at the site, and Minnie had the same sort of stab mark on her neck. Bentley was found a short ways off, huddled behind a crate.

Minnie's murder, coming right on the heels of Shelly's, raised quite an outcry from the good citizens of Nye County. Sheriff Purvis redoubled his efforts and assigned Deputy Donald Harris to work on the murders full-time. When questioned about the inadequacy of these measures, he said that he would call in expert help from the outside if and when it became necessary. End of discussion.

"This is Andy Garcia, Channel Three's roving reporter, coming to you live from the alley next to Webber's Feed and Grain. We're here at the scene of the latest in a series of bizarre murders plaguing the tiny community of Lathrop Wells. Last night Mary Lou Henson, seventeen-year-old high school student and cheerleader, had a fight with her boyfriend. In a fit of temper she ran into this very alley, and never came out."

The picture of an ambiguously pretty blonde flashed briefly across the screen. "With us, to describe what happened, is Robert Slocum, Mary Lou's boyfriend and an eyewitness to the brutal assault." Andy turned to the painfully thin, lank-haired young man beside him and the camera panned in for a close-up.

"I know this has been a terrible experience for you, Bob, so just tell us what happened in your own words."

Bob fidgeted for a moment, then pushing back his Stetson, he began.

"Well, we'd stopped over to the Three Ponies for a burger." He motioned across the street. "And, well, I was just talking to the new waitress, you know, makin' her feel welcome and all. And the next thing I know, Mary Lou gets into one of her little moods and runs off crying. I didn't think anything of it at first. She has, er, had quite a temper, but she always got over things pretty quick. Anyway, when she didn't come back I got worried and went looking for her."

"And your search led you to this alley," Andy prompted.

"Yeah, I was walking down the street calling her name when I heard this scuffling sound and came over to take a look. There wasn't much light, so I couldn't see very well. But I heard that scuffling again, and a kind of moaning, gurgling sound.

Artwork by Kaja Foglio

"Remembering that Shelly Cooper'd been found just down the street, I went in real cautious-like. And I saw ... I don't know ...." Bob's eyes grew wide. It was clear he was trying to make sense of something pretty horrible, and that he didn't expect to be believed.

"It's all right, Bob," Andy said. "Just go on and tell us what you saw."

"It was dark, you know, just a little light from the street lamp shining in at an angle. It might have been anything, but there was something or someone about the size of a kid leaning over Mary Lou. The outline didn't look right though, like it was deformed, maybe. I don't know, I couldn't really see and I'd had a couple of beers.

"Anyway, I rushed in to try and get it off her. But before I got close, it jumped up and just disappeared."

"You mean he moved so quickly it *seemed* like he disappeared," Andy said, his smile looking just a little forced. "He probably used those trash cans to climb over the wall, and you were too stunned by what had happened to stop him, right?" The camera panned down the narrow, cluttered passage. The alley dead-ended in a tumble of crates and trash cans against a brick wall.

"No, I swear it! He just jumped straight up and vanished," Bob insisted, shaking his head. "I'm telling you, this guy, this thing wasn't human, it just jumped up and disappeared!" Garcia cut him off as he started to babble.

"And that's our report on the third in a string of bizarre murders that continue to trouble the once sleepy community of Lathrop Wells. Back to you, Nancy." The scene cut back to the studio where reporter Nancy Patterson rattled off personal information about the three victims and recapped the earlier murders. There was nothing new.

I sat there just staring at the screen. It couldn't be, yet the teenage Van Helsing in my soul cried, "Vampire!" Bob's description of how Mary Lou's assailant just jumped up and disappeared was right out of an Anne Rice novel. The loss of blood, the stab wound like a bite, the night time attacks, it all added up. I knew I had to do something, but what *could* I do?

"How much difference can there be between exterminating vampires and exterminating termites?" I asked myself, trying to sound rational. "After all, the principle's the same, you just need different equipment." I wasn't sure I bought all the supernatural stuff about vampires, but I have to admit, I felt a lot better after I dug the crucifix out of the trunk I kept in the spare room. I put it up in my bedroom before I turned in that night, but I was too excited to sleep much.

The next morning I bolted out of bed as soon as it was light. Edgy from more than lack of sleep, I fixed a pot of really strong coffee and wolfed down a hearty breakfast of leftover chili as I watched the early morning news report. Around seven-thirty I called to reschedule the job I had later that day in Mercury.

I found myself pacing back and forth in my cluttered workshop, trying to decide what to do next, and figured I needed to talk to someone about what was going on before I did anything else. But who could I talk to who wouldn't have me locked up? Bernie was still around, living in Tonopah now, because of his job with the County Water Department. But since he'd married Marj Baker five years earlier, he'd turned into a real stick-in-the-mud. Still, I figured if anyone would listen to me, it'd be Bernie.

I waited till about nine to drop by his office, so he'd have time to get settled and have a cup of coffee. He could be a real bear if you caught him before his second cup.

"Hi, Bern," I said with a grin as I poked my head in the door. "How're things in Bureaucracy land?"

"OK, Marv. Same as always." There was a question mark in his no-nonsense brown eyes, but he motioned me to sit. I poured myself a cup of coffee, and dropped into the chair beside his desk.

"So, you been keeping up with the news much lately?" I began, taking a sip of the vile brew he makes. Bernie never cleans the damn pot.

"Hard not to." His tone was noncommittal. "It's a damn shame about Shelly, though. I hear from Marj that the sheriff is planning to bring in a team of homicide detectives from Vegas to look into the murders." Marj worked part-time at the sheriff's office while the kids were at school.

"Frankly, I don't think they'll get any further with the investigation than Purvis has," I said. Dead air pause. "They're barking up the wrong tree, if you ask me."

"Marvin, I can see where you're going with this, and I'll tell you right now, I'm not going to go skulking around filthy alleys, in the middle of the night, clutching stakes and crosses."

"But Bernie, you don't understand!"

"No, Marv, *you* don't understand. That was all right when we were in high school. I mean, I thought it was kind of fun then, but we're too old for that nonsense now. Whoever's killing these women is a real freak. Maybe he thinks he's a vampire. Who knows? But do us both a big favor and let the police handle it." Well, I really couldn't blame him, he did have a wife and two kids to look out for.

"Chill out, man!" I grinned at him. "I was only going to ask you if you had any ideas about what was going on, but obviously you don't want to talk about it. I can take a hint."

"Look, Marv, I didn't mean to jump down your throat like that. But I'm really busy right now. I'll talk to Marj about having you over again real soon and we can talk about stuff then, OK?"

"Sure, Bernie" I said, swigging down the rest of my coffee with a grimace and getting to my feet.

Just then the phone rang and he turned away to pick it up.

"I'll talk to you later," I called, snatching the county planning map for the Lathrop Wells area from the shelf by the door on my way out.

Distracted by the call, he didn't even notice. I felt a little guilty about snitching county property, but what the hell, the circumstances warranted the theft. Besides, I'd return it to him when I was done with it, I hoped.

My first stop, after leaving Bernie, had been the Catholic church, where I filled two of the bottles for my sprayer unit from the holy water font. I figured the spray nozzles, with their wide-area coverage, would be very effective in case there was more than one of those suckers hanging around.

I noticed soap bubbles when I put the tops on. I guess I'd been in too much of a hurry to rinse all the detergent out when I'd washed them that morning. But, hey, a little soap shouldn't hurt. I mean, the water was still blessed. wasn't it? Just for good measure, I left a twenty-dollar donation in the poor box by the font.

Then I stopped at the local junk shop. It's amazing the stuff you can find in those places. I picked up two crucifixes and a rosary, which I hung around my neck for good measure. Then I made a real find. Stacked up in a dusty corner in the back was a bunch of wooden

Artwork by Kaja Foglio

slats, the kind you use for picket fences. The slats could be split into stakes with very little work, so I bought those, too.

Finally, after an hour spent poring through the back issue files of the Tonopah newspaper office, I stopped at the market for garlic. I needed bread and milk anyway, not to mention something quick for lunch, since I wanted to get back on the road for home as soon as possible. I grabbed a jar of beef jerky and a six-pack of sodas on the way out.

Chewing on a hunk of jerky and swigging cola, I sat at the table in my work room about two hours later. I had newspaper articles and notes spread everywhere, while I charted the location of each of the attacks on my borrowed map. I was trying to figure out the most likely place for my quarry to hide, remembering that vampires must lie hidden from the sunlight.

Just on the off-chance that the Sheriff was right about there being a tie-in with the animal mutilations, I'd marked them on the map, too. As I connected the dots by date, it became clear that something had been moving steadily towards Lathrop Wells for several months now, but the latest attacks all centered around the abandoned warehouse at the train yard where Minnie's body was found.

It was almost four o'clock by the time I sat looking into the cavernous loading dock of the abandoned freight warehouse. The yard itself was empty, stripped of trash by the wind which blew almost constantly from the desert beyond.

I parked my panel truck as near as I could without obscuring my view of the place, and climbed out. Garlanded with garlic and armed with crosses, stakes, and consecrated water, I was as prepared as I could be. So I crossed myself, murmured a short prayer I hadn't realized I remembered, and climbed the stairs to the loading dock.

Though it was still late afternoon, I switched on the high-beam halogen lamp I used for foundation and attic work, sweeping the light through the hot dusty stillness as I entered. I was hoping to discover the vampire while it slept, figuring that even if they didn't really lie helpless during the day, they might still need siestas. Moving with what stealth I could, I skirted the piles of refuse and debris which were strewn across the cracked concrete floor. Packing material had been left everywhere. My skin prickled as I scented a kind of bitter mustiness. With that odor came the sense of some sort of presence. Maybe it was my imagination, but it seemed to grow stronger as I moved deeper into the shadowy interior.

Then I heard a scuttling sound to my right, and my heart raced. Trigger finger ready on the sprayer lever, I turned to sweep the area with the light, but there was nothing. Probably a rat, I told myself trying to steady my nerves, but then I caught a hint of movement over to the left. Once again I turned, but there was nothing to be seen. The third time it happened I knew I was being stalked! Engulfed by a sudden tide of panic, I stumbled backwards, then turned to run for the loading bay. At least out there I'd have a chance to make it back to the truck.

But before I'd gone five feet the damn thing was on me, leaping out of nowhere. It landed squarely on my left shoulder, knocking me backwards into a pile of packing foam, which saved me from a concussion, but the impact dislocated my shoulder. Without thinking I'd squeezed the sprayer trigger as it came down on top of me, drenching it with holy water.

Startled, it jumped away, but even in the dusky light I got a good, clear look at it before it escaped. The memory of its brittle touch and musty stench made me nauseous as I struggled to rise. It was horrible, worse than I'd ever imagined. Somehow, I managed to get to my feet and stumble out of the warehouse, clutching my left arm to my chest. I didn't stop till I was safely back in the cab of my truck.

I sat there for several minutes, eyes glued to the entrance, shaking and sweating, just trying to make sense of what I'd seen. The numbness in my arm was nothing compared to the

numbness in my mind. Horrible in its familiarity, this monster was no elegant supernatural creature dining savagely on beautiful women. No, what had attacked me was a filthy parasite. In the dark the general body shape might well have given the impression of a deformed man, and of course it had leaped away and disappeared. A flea the size of a Springer spaniel could probably leap a hundred feet straight up with ease.

Since fleas were basically tiny heat-seeking missiles, it would have no trouble hunting by night. Though it did seem odd that it laid low during the daylight hours, since mostly fleas aren't sensitive to light, and heat only makes them more active. But then, this creature hadn't looked quite like any flea I'd ever seen; the mouth parts were proportionally smaller for one thing, and the body longer.

It would have taken a whole series of mutations to allow it to attain such a size, I reasoned. First, the thing would've had to develop some sort of lung, or other method of breathing, since the oxygenation system normally employed by fleas is a series of capillary tubes which absorb oxygen from slots in their sides. As the exoskeleton thickened to accommodate its ever-expanding mass, this would have made such capillary action too inefficient.

The implications of that kind of long-term mutation were mind-boggling and to me, quite frankly, terrifying. That meant there must be a whole nest of those things out there, mutating and growing with each new generation. How long would it take a creature the size of a pinhead to become that big? I wasn't really sure just how radiation affected the mutation process, I'd have to let the scientists work that one out. A scene from the movie *Them* suddenly flashed though my mind, and I shuddered. I'd had nightmares for weeks after I saw that damn film.

Now that I was calmer, I started wondering why it hadn't attacked a second time, or come after me. But of course, if it had a borderline oxygenation system and was still using the side slits, even partially, it must have been like getting a nose full water when I doused it. Hell, with the little bit of soap residue I'd noticed in the tanks when I filled them, to break the surface tension, I might even have done it some real damage. I sure hoped so, 'cause I knew I was going to have to go back in there and finish the job if I could. If there *were* more, I'd have to get help to find them, and the only way I was going to do that was to have indisputable evidence. Unfortunately, the best evidence I could get was still in the warehouse.

Keeping a wary eye on the gaping maw of the loading dock, I climbed slowly out of the truck and edged over to the locker where I kept the flea and tick spray. The meters on both canisters read full, and the nozzles were clear. So far so good. Opening the next locker, I pulled out the hooded protective suit and mask I used when spraying enclosed spaces. It wasn't easy working with one arm, especially since the shock of the injury was wearing off and my left shoulder was beginning to ache like a son-of-a-bitch.

Somehow I managed to get the suit unrolled. Besides protecting me from the spray, the extra gear would make it harder for the thing to sink its mandibles into me. My left arm was totally useless by then, but I finally got into the suit and strapped the canister harness over top of it. When I was sure everything was in working order, I tucked my injured arm into the strap of the harness so it would have some support and be out of the way. Then I headed back inside for the showdown.

This time I scanned the rafters as well as the floor. I knew I wouldn't be fast enough to leap aside if it jumped me again, but I was damn sure gonna try if it did. Oddly, there seemed to be no sign of the thing. Wondering if it had escaped through another exit, I kept up the search. As I drew near the back wall of the interior where it had waited before, I heard a soft steady wheezing sound, and paused to listen more closely. The noise, muffled as it was by the hood I wore, sounded like a busted accordion, and it was coming from a filthy pile of debris in the corner.

Warily I crept closer, constantly scanning the area, alert for any movement. Sure enough it was in there, I could see its dark bulk half buried in the clutter of the nest. Opening fire without hesitation, I emptied the entire contents of the first canister full-throttle onto the flea. It struggled weakly, then lay still. When I was certain it was dead, I took another complete tour of the warehouse, but found nothing. If there were others, they didn't lair here, and that was fine with me. I'd had about as much of this hero business as I cared for, at least for one day.

Careful not to damage the body, I managed to wrap it in one of the tarps from the truck and haul it outside, where I bundled it into the main storage compartment. (Luckily, it was relatively light, proving more unwieldy than anything else.) Then I stripped off my hood and the harness, leaving them where they lay, and hauled myself back into the cab. The sun hung over the horizon as I drove back towards the main road, shoulder throbbing, but elated.

I'd intended to take the carcass to the government lab out at the Test Site for the experts to look over. But then I got to thinking about all those government cover-ups that keep popping up in the news, and decided to go see the folks over at Channel Three instead. Heck, Las Vegas wasn't that far and I'd always wanted to meet Andy Garcia. Besides, just think what the publicity would do for my business! I could see the ad now. A picture of me with *The Flea* and the caption would read, "No pest problem is too big for Marvin Gilman, Exterminator!" Smiling grimly to myself, I turned onto the main highway.

❄

Cynthia Mc Quillin lives in an old Victorian house in Berkeley, California, with Dr. Jane Robinson (her partner in the music/comedy duet Mid-Life Crisis) and three cats. She is currently trying to sell her first novel — a fantasy about a street-singer turned psychic healer — and working on her second, a vampire novel. In addition to being a gifted writer of fantasy, Cynthia is a prolific and versatile singer/songwriter. She also owns and operates her own music company, Unlikely Publications, and creates beautiful, hand-crafted jewelry, which she sells along with tapes, cds, and songbooks at sf and fantasy conventions.

Kaja (pronounced K-eye-uh) **Foglio** has been a successful fantasy artist since 1993, when she started contributing work to Magic the Gathering™. She recently took over Slag Blah Entertainment Inc. (publisher of the XXXenophile Game), and started her own company — Studio Foglio. She and her husband Phil live in Seattle, Washington. These days she spends most of her time running the two businesses, but still makes time for fun art assignments. You can see more of her work by visiting her website at www.studiofoglio.com.

Rogue Soup

by Janet Stewart

In a flutter of stubby wings, a chickadee dove in through the window and landed on Challandra's shoulder.

"Oh dear," said the worthy sorceress, pushing her spectacles up her nose with a plump finger. She listened carefully as the tiny bird whistled urgently in her ear. "Yes, yes, you were quite right to bring me this news! I shall most definitely have to take steps. Away with you now, and don't bother your little black head any more about it."

The chickadee chirped once more, a relieved glint in its beady black eye, and launched itself from Challandra's shoulder. After one swooping circuit of the room it catapulted back out the window, doing a madcap carrel roll between Challandra's freshly pressed curtains. Challandra laid down her knitting and rose from her rocking chair. "Kip!" she called briskly to the small boy standing in the doorway of their mountain cabin, his arms laden with wood. "Stop gawking and bring in that firewood. Poke up the fire, put the bronze cauldron on the hob, and fill it with water."

"At last!" cried Kip, his gamin face wrinkling with glee. "What are we going to do? Brew up a storm? Summon a dragon? Hatch a gryphon egg?"

"We're going to make soup."

"Soup!" Kip dropped the load of logs all over the polished plank floor. Clouds gathered in his sky-blue eyes. "You're going to *cook*?" He drew back a patched boot and fetched a chunk of birch a healthy kick. "I thought we were going to cast some spells!"

"Kip!" Challandra's big brown eyes snapped behind the thick spectacles and her plump cheeks quivered ominously. "Pick up that wood and do as I asked you while I gather the ingredients! Or else!"

Reluctantly Kip did as he was told while the plump figure of his mistress bustled about the cabin. No good crossing Challandra in *that* mood. He'd thought that he was on to a good thing a year ago when he had stumbled upon Challandra's cabin, a lost and starving orphan. Now he wasn't so sure. In settlements all over the mountains he had heard Challandra's Power spoken of in hushed whispers, but he had yet to see much evidence of it. And who would expect a powerful sorceress to look like her? Almost as wide as she was tall, with an absurd bun of graying hair perched on the very top of her head? Was a sorceress supposed to talk to birds and look like everybody's favorite grandmother?

"Power comes in all shapes and forms, Kip," said Challandra, bringing an armload of herbs and vegetables to a small table by the fire. "Why do you suppose I agreed to take you as an apprentice?"

Kip jumped, spilling water down the front of his jerkin. "I hate it when you do that."

"Do what?"

"Use your Power to read my mind that way."

Challandra laughed, her good humor restored. "My chick, I don't need Power for that! Everything you think shows on your face! Now what's gotten you into such a tizz?"

"Well ..." Kip dumped a last bucket of water into the cauldron and stood back, hands on hips. "Muzzle it, Challandra, I signed on to learn magic, not meal preparation! When are we going to do some sorcery?"

"Patience," said Challandra, turning away to arrange all her ingredients conveniently to hand. "A good recipe, my dear Kip, is like any good spell. The steps must be followed exactly to end up with a worthy result. Fetch me my long-handled spoon."

Growing interested in spite of himself, Kip ran to fetch the tool from a low shelf. "So what are we making then?"

"I told you. Soup. Rogue soup."

"Rogue soup? What's that?"

"A soup to catch rogues, Kip!" laughed Challandra. Her brown eyes sparkled amber in the light of the fire. "Pull up that stool now, so that you can get a good view."

The two conspirators leaned over the cauldron. Tiny bubbles formed in the clear depths and floated to the top as the water warmed.

"To make Rogue soup, Kip," Challandra whispered, "start with two rogues, or rascals, if you will." From a small ornately-carven chest Challandra lifted two doll figures. One was clad in black silk robes bedecked with red symbols, the other in the ordinary leather jerkin of a traveling journeyman. Kip watched openmouthed as Challandra cast them both into the cauldron. Down they sank like stones to the bottom of the pot, and seethed there, giving off streams of inky blackness.

Rapidly the whole cauldron full of water turned as dark as a cloudy night. Chills raced up and down Kip's spine like mice as he gazed into the cauldron. Shapes writhed and twisted against that midnight curtain, gradually taking solid form, until the guttersnipe turned would-be sorcerer realized he was watching two men on horseback in a woodland glade, as if he were gazing at

them through a window ....

"Watch!" said Challandra. "And listen ...."

"She's been a thorn in my backside for years," said Lazarus the Wizard. "The Power that she has is rightfully mine, yet she won't give it up. The Heart should be easy enough to steal, just an old woman and a boy. She won't oppose you. The use of actual physical force is against her creed, can you believe that? Women!" Lazarus cackled briefly, then sneezed and rubbed his nose on a gnarled finger. The breeze in these benighted woods was bringing on his rheum again.

Tobias Journeyman eyed the fantastic figure in front of him rather dubiously. Who but a madman would wear silk robes into the woods on this chilly spring day? Lazarus's pinched narrow face had an unhealthy pallor under the lank greasy stalks of his hair; his hunched figure reminded Tobias of a particular slow and clumsy beetle with a poisonous sting. The peculiar red symbols imprinted on the wizard's clothes filled the simple journeyman with foreboding, and the black steed the wizard sat ... it looked like a horse, smelled like a horse, but was it really a horse? Tobias wasn't so sure.

Lazarus impatiently bounced the sack of gold on his palm, instantly attracting Tobias's eye to the movement. Jobs had been few and far between lately, and when had he ever turned up his nose at a bit of brigandage? "I'll do it."

The wizard beamed. "Excellent!" He tossed the sack of gold to Tobias. "Half now, the same again when you deliver the Heart to me. The easiest gold you ever made, my friend!"

"I wonder," muttered Tobias, turning his skinny gelding's head to follow the path up the mountain that led to Challandra's house.

"So!" Challandra tapped her fingernail against her bottom lip. "My little feathered friend was right. Lazarus has decided to make a move at last."

"What are we going to do?" cried Kip.

"Thicken the broth ..." hissed Challandra, her voice a slurred whisper. She lifted a red pottery bowl full of meal and poured it into the cauldron.

Artwork by Rob Alexander

Artwork by Rob Alexander

With a start, Kip realized the bright sunny day outside the hut had abruptly clouded over.

Tobias picked his way upward, bending almost double to spy out the trail and dragging his unwilling horse by the reins. Where had this blasted mist come from? As thick as soup, it had come swooping out of nowhere, forcing him to dismount and cutting his speed to almost nothing. The journeyman swore as a thornbush loomed like a malignant shadow out of the murk, raking malicious fingers across his face. This so-called easy job was turning into a nightmare!

"He isn't stopping, Challandra!" Kip cried. "What goes in next?"

"Vegetables," crooned Challandra. "For body and nourishment." Dried peas, corn, onions, and other small vegetables rattled from a big wooden scoop into the cauldron, striking the water like ...

Hail! Tobias flung up his arms to shelter his head. A deluge of hailstones pounded down on him, striking tiny stinging blows like a million little fists. His horse reared in fright, swinging on its hind legs. Frantically clutching the reins, Tobias was dragged several yards through the mud before the gelding finally tore itself free and disappeared into the mist. Tobias lay for a few minutes catching his breath, then doggedly picked himself up and kept going.

"He's a stubborn fellow," Kip observed.

"He is indeed," Challandra agreed. "A pity he must stoop to theft like this."

"Thanks," said a familiar deep voice. Tobias Journeyman stood with drawn sword in the cabin doorway. Mud smeared the front of his jerkin; blood showed in a ruby line across his cheek; he glared at them both out of furious green eyes.

"My dear fellow, you look somewhat the worse for wear," Challandra began, only to be cut off by a pass of the journeyman's gleaming sword.

"No more tricks, witch!" snapped Tobias. "I should have known that lizard Lazarus would lie to me. Now give me what I came for before I get violent!"

Challandra lifted her long-handled spoon dropping from the cauldron. Nestled in the spoon's bowl was a red jewel the size of Kip's fist. One jagged piece was missing. The sorceress held it out to Tobias. "This is what you want. Go on, take it, it's not hot."

The journeyman-thief leaped forward and snatched the Heart from the spoon. "After the time I had getting up here, I would have thought you would put up more of a fight, old woman," he sneered.

"I'm far too old for any swordplay shenanigans," said Challandra coldly. "Nor will I risk the boy's life. It's against what I — and that jewel you've stolen — stand for, as I know you've been told. All the same, I'll advise you not to press me, sir. You have what you came for; now will you kindly depart?"

Green eyes met brown for a long moment. Without another word, Tobias strode out of the cabin. Kip and Challandra turned as one to bend over the cauldron. "Now some herbs I think, to add flavor," said Challandra. A pinch of powdered leaves and a patter of strange spicy seeds scattered from her fingers into the cauldron.

Tobias took long sliding strides down the mountain slope. The mist seemed to have cleared. He wasn't surprised. What could she do to him now, anyway? Wait 'til he saw that wizard! He was going to ... He fell headlong on his hands and knees, scraping his palm painfully on the rocky soil.

Stunned, he rolled over and looked at his feet. A vine was wrapped firmly around his boot. How had that happened? The journeyman jerked free and dusted himself off as best he could. As he straightened up, a leaf tickled the back of his neck. He whirled. A willow tree seemed to be ... *leaning* toward him, as if it were ... *alive?* It couldn't be! He backed away, his sword leaping into his hand, but what could steel do against plants? Was the grass growing longer, even as he watched? "Challandra!" Tobias screamed, and took off running as fast as he could go.

"Throw another log on the fire, Kip," said Challandra. "It's time to turn up the heat!"

* * *

Tobias kicked open the door of Lazarus's showy town house and stormed inside. The wizard leaped up like a startled cat from his chair. Before he could say anything, the dirty, infuriated journeyman stalked over and seized Lazarus by the throat. "So, she won't oppose me, hey?" he roared, shaking the smaller man like a cat shakes a rat. "She nearly killed me, you charlatan, without lifting a finger! Easiest gold I'll ever make, hey? Give me the rest of my pay, you liar!"

Lazarus croaked desperately, unable to gasp out a coherent word. He pointed frantically to the sack lying on a nearby divan. Tobias tossed the wizard aside and opened the deerhide pouch. Gold clinked into his palm. "All here. Lucky for you, you didn't try to cheat me on top of everything else!"

The journeyman tossed Challandra's Heart onto the divan. "Here's your cursed jewel; good riddance to you both! That's the last time I work for any kind of a wizard!" The door slammed loudly behind Tobias's mudcaked figure.

Lazarus paid no heed to his going, scrambling instead to lift the Heart in trembling fingers. Time enough to revenge himself for that oaf's insults when he possessed Challandra's Power. The Heart was his at last!

"Lovely stone, oh you pretty thing," crooned Lazarus as he carried the Heart to a waiting iron chest by the fire. Holding the great red stone in his lap, he unlocked the five locks and flipped back the lid.

Within was the missing fragment of Challandra's Heart. Reverently Lazarus fitted the two together and sat back to feel the Power fill him, eyes shut in ecstasy.

Nothing happened. The wizard's eyes popped open again. Why wasn't it working? Lazarus gaped in horror at the Heart. The glowing red color was darkening rapidly to black. Ugly cracks opened in the crystalline surface. What on earth could be wrong? Unless ... unless this wasn't the real Heart.

"Challandra!" screamed Lazarus, as the Heart crumbled to dust between his fingers, taking the small bit of Power he had possessed with it.

"But I don't understand, Challandra," complained Kip. "What did he want the red stone for, anyway?"

"Power comes in all shapes and forms, Kip, as I told you," said Challandra, stirring the soup energetically. "Mine is the Power that runs through the land. The Power that makes the wind blow, that brings the beasts to birth, even that which makes bread rise, is all part of my ability. You believe that you haven't seen sorcery since you came to me, Kip —" Kip blushed furiously "—yet my Power has been at work all around you. Sorcery isn't all hatching gryphon eggs, you know. This —" The little sorceress handed the spoon to Kip and bustled over to lift a leather pouch down from a shelf. She tipped it up, and the real Heart rolled into her hand. "— This has always been the center of that Power. It was split long ago, for reasons not even I remember, and the fragment fell into Lazarus's hands.

"That rogue sought to bend the fragment's Power to evil uses that it was never meant for, but he couldn't do much without the whole Heart. He's coveted it for years, until at last he decided to seize it for himself. We foiled him though, with our Rogue soup, and tomorrow I think we'll see this into a safer place."

Challandra tucked the Heart lovingly back into the pouch and restored it to the shelf. She came back to the fire and bent to taste the soup. The soup, Kip realized, had become just an ordinary soup, one quite savory-smelling. The tenderized vegetables were bobbing in the thick spicy broth; Kip's stomach rumbled.

"Delicious!" cried Challandra. "Get the bowls down, Kip. Supper's ready!" ❄

Janet Stewart writes: "'Rogue Soup' is the first of my stories that you have accepted. I've worn you down at last! I am twenty-six, unmistakably female, and I live with my parents on four hundred acres near the St. Lawrence River. When I'm not writing I raise sheep. Add that to your list of weird day jobs for writers. When I'm not writing or working, I'm usually riding my horse, Blue, an aged gelding who has lived so long that I'm afraid he's now smarter than I am."

Rob Alexander and his wife Susan Stejskal, also an artist, recently moved near Eugene, Oregon. Rob has been voted a Cauldron award for past work in these pages and won a Chesley Award at this year's WorldCon in San Antonio, Texas (unfortunately, for work published elsewhere).

Artwork by Vincent Di Fate

DARK QUEEN

by Kathryn J. Brown

They say you can see her on dark winter nights when the wind rustles through the trees and makes your skin crawl, when the snow is freshly fallen and deep enough to creep down the lining of your boots, and when the tallest, oldest trees are dressed in their bridal wear with icicle earrings. They say it is only then that the Dark Queen returns to the garden.

Tonight I am waiting for her. Tomorrow I will be wed to Michael, a good-hearted, sensible man who has no belief in the old legends. So it has to be tonight. My gloved hands build little snow creatures and set them at my side on the stone bench, to serve as tiny guardians. I start to name them until the wind steals my concentration and sends it tumbling across the snow.

Grandmother told me what to do. She knows. She saw the Dark Queen walk out, alone, into the snow, seventy years ago. She told me about it as she sewed the glass beads onto my wedding dress, her voice slow and serious, rhythmic as the undulating needle.

The Dark Queen comes alone, but she always leaves with three sets of footprints in the snow.

Three sets? How can that be?

You'll know tonight.

Something moves in the swirling white, a black shape slowly coming toward me. The Dark Queen walks without feeling the wind, her boots rising and falling soundlessly, her ball gown rippling around her body like a black tide. Her crown is made of ice.

Grandmother? Sarah says someone taunted the Dark Queen once, and broke her crown. She says they found him two days later, frozen to death in his own bed, surrounded by shards of broken ice. Is that true?

Perhaps.

Grandmother? Christopher says the Dark Queen found an orphan girl once, who had been left out in the snow to starve. He says the Dark Queen gave her a necklace of gold beads that never ran out, but when the girl married, the necklace melted into a puddle of water on her wedding night. Is that true?

Perhaps.

I rise and scatter a handful of dead leaves before her, then curtsy low, my knees stinging as they brush against the snow. "Good evening, Your Majesty."

Her face is proud and sharp, carved of ice, but she smiles with black lips. "Good evening, child. Were you waiting for me?" I nod and she speaks again. "Why?" Her voice is like someone trying to sing after they have forgotten all the words, like skates moving musically across a frozen lake.

"Tomorrow is my wedding."

She sits beside me on the bench, sweeping my snow animals aside with a pale, bare hand. Her fingers are like slender icicles. "May it serve you well."

Grandmother? Andrew says the Dark Queen had two lovers once, but they died in the war and were buried in the garden. He says that she returns for them. Is that true?

Perhaps.

Isn't there anything you know for certain about her? Anything?

She comes making only one set of footprints, but leaves with three.

"Your Majesty? Would you give me a wedding gift?"

She laughs, mist rising from her lips like white fire. "Perhaps I will, since you have asked so nicely. What do you wish?"

"I want to know magic. I want to know why the man who abused you died surrounded by shattered ice, why the golden necklace melted, and why you come to this garden in the snow. I want to know everything mystical in the night."

"You are wise, child, or perhaps not so wise. Most would have asked for gold or jeweled dresses. Know firstly that the man died from the coldness of his own heart, and the ice shards around him were his uncaring acts. Know secondly that the necklace melted because it was really nothing but snow to begin with. True love melts all winter toys, even gold. Know lastly that I come to this garden because I cannot rest until the night someone makes me a bed of snow and lets me lie down beside my lovers."

Just as Grandmother had said. I rise and lead the Dark Queen to the bed I have shaped from snow beneath the shade of the willow. "Sleep, Your Majesty. Grandmother says you have paid for their deaths long enough."

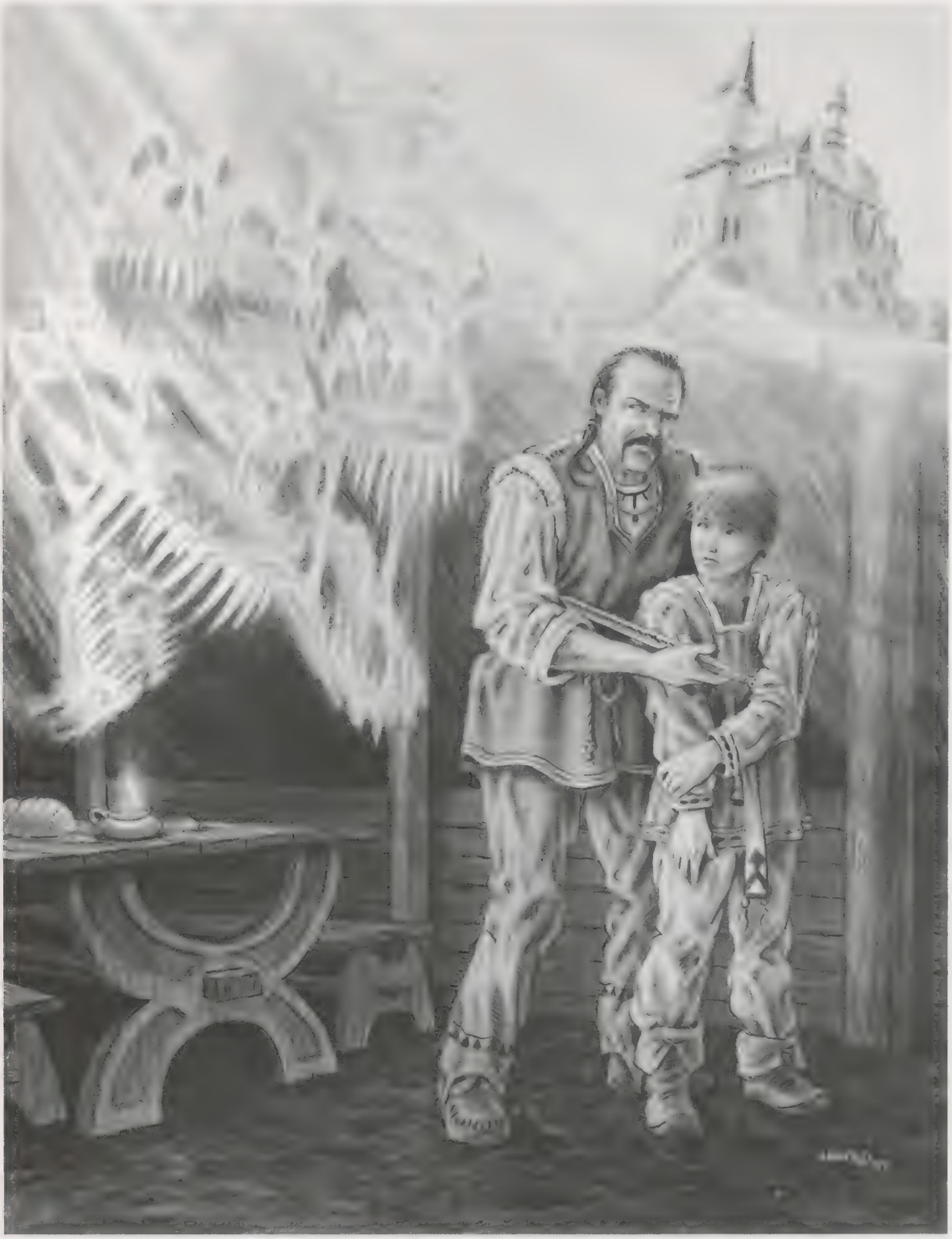
"Bless you, child." For a moment she turns to face me. "The most important lesson is that of the footprints. Since you have given me my rest, I will give you that. Remember this, child, during your wedding and for all time. When you love something, it walks with you forever." Then she lies on the bed, her dress spreading across the snow mattress in the intricate patterns of black frost.

A long moment passes before I look at her again. When I finally do, my first thought is that the falling white flakes have merely covered her motionless body. Only when I touch her arm do I realize that the Dark Queen has turned to snow.

❄

Kathryn J. Brown lives in Seattle with her husband/editor/agent, where she spends an inordinate amount of her time spinning stories on her antique Brother WP-55, as well as spinning blood with the centrifuge in her laboratory at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.

Vincent Di Fate is regarded as one of the world's major illustrators of futuristic themes, having received the Skylark, Lensman, and Hugo Awards.



Artwork by Jonathan Hunt

Winterkill

by Colin Dunn

In the winter of the world, Ice Demons would steal down from the north, and clutch at us with fingers like sleet. In the darkness of night they would whisper to us in their soft, seductive voices, *Let us in. We only want to be warm.* Their claws would slide across the closed shutters, with the sound of softly shattering icicles. All night, Papa would sit up in front of the fireplace, keeping it fed and chanting the prayers to keep the Demons away. He would lock the shutters from inside, and kept the key on a chain around his thick neck. Sometimes, children, being the most vulnerable to the dark whispers in the night, would throw open shutters and let the Ice in, dooming the whole household.

When I was ten, a family two miles down the main trade road got taken by the Ice. A Warlock from the Fortress bolted in, his Power protecting him from the cold. Along with the local militia, he investigated the house. By his Power, and what he channeled from the Fortress, he was able to tell that one of the children, Bjarne, a boy my age and a friend, had flung open the shutters to the mercy of the Ice. He was the first to die, the echo of his death still locked in the frozen flesh of his mind. The Demons had killed the entire house, all twenty sheltering under that roof. The grandfather, standing vigil at the fire, had been the last to go, the fire sustaining him so that the Demons had to take on a physical form and rend him, to force him to give up the warmth that they so craved.

I remember, after that, that Papa had taken me to the Temple, where, along with the other children of the Holt, I underwent a purification ritual. Children who let the Ice in were anathema, and any who had contact with them had to be cleansed, lest they too give their families to the Ice. For the rest of that winter, my kin watched me, sometimes directly, sometimes not. My oldest brother, Arne, took to sleeping in the kids' dorm, and some nights he would stay up, keeping an eye on me. They loved me, but they didn't trust me. The first night when the Demons came whispering outside our windows, Papa came into the dorm and tied me into my bed. I was hurt, humiliated. Was I not of ten seasons, just two seasons from adulthood? I was not a child to be tied in my bed, like some five-seasoner too weak to resist the Ice. I couldn't look at anyone in my family for days after that. Only Sten, my uncle's son, said anything about it, and Papa silenced him with a slap that sent him tumbling. "Demons are not for joking, pup," he growled, and that ended it.

No one else was lost to the Ice that winter, and when the ice on the river broke we held the Rite of Spring, and celebrated the return of the Light. With the ice broken, the Demons could no longer creep down from their homes in the Wastes. The rivers were the key, the trail they followed from the north to the lands of men. During the summer, the household dispersed, with nothing worse than the Na'harth to contend with. The Fortress had pacified most of the Tribes by then, and the Werdin had yet to appear from the east to lead them to rebellion. Summer was a time of hard work, from dawn to dusk spent in the fields and the mines, the forests and on the lakes, gathering food and building material, iron and gold for the Fortress. Summer was also the time of building, with my father's house growing by yet another addition. Arne took a wife, and by fall she was pregnant.

When the warm winds of summer turned to the chill breezes of autumn, the family began to return to the household. Other families started their inward migration back to the Holt, leaving summer holdings to the tender mercies of the weather and the Ice. By the autumnal equinox, everyone was back for the winter. We were still safe, at least until the rivers froze over. Then the Demons would return from the north, to try to steal the warmth, life, and soul of any human they encountered. Even the Na'harth feared them, though no Demon is ever known to have preyed upon them. Maybe they had some way of keeping them pacified, but now, after the Burning, we'll never know.

It was five weeks after the equinox when the Draw River froze. It was the smallest of those flowing down from the Wastes, and always the first to freeze. That night we all sat huddled in the dining hall, while Papa fed the fire and led the chants. These first few nights were the most dangerous, as the Demons would be fierce and hungry. They howled outside the house that night, screaming at us. *LET US IN! WE NEED YOU!* The youngers and babies had to be restrained, lest they open a window or door to appease the awful, wailing demands from the Ice.

In the light of the next day, we learned of disaster. Somehow, one of the doors to the main barn had been left unbolted, and the Demons had gotten in. All the large livestock were dead, frozen solid by the Ice. Luckily, the horse barn was separate, as well as the goats and chickens. But we had lost all the cattle, sheep and pigs, the meat animals that were our wealth and livelihood. Arne rode to the Temple to get

a message to the Fortress, and a Warlock bolted out that afternoon. He stayed all night, walking around the barn. The Ice Demons knew better than to tangle with a Second Circle servant of the Fortress, and just to be certain he singed a few of them as he made his investigation. A Warlock's Power, even augmented by the Fortress, is insufficient to harm a Demon, but it does shield one from the doom of the Ice, and the application of a Warlock's Power could frighten a Demon, though nothing more.

The results of that investigation he made clear to us the next day. It was clear to him that the door had been left unbolted on purpose. The very idea horrified us. We may eat our animals, but to leave them open to the Ice ... was unthinkable. Unfortunately the resonances created by the Demons and the deaths of the animals made it impossible for him to identify the monster who had done this, only that it must be a member of the household. Eyes turned to me then, tainted by my association with the Ice-damned child of the previous winter. But no one said anything, at least not then.

The Demons didn't come that night, probably scared off by the residue of the Warlock's power. But they came the night after, their claws prying at the shutters, their voices more subdued, more alluring. The children were dosed to keep them asleep, dangerous because the drug can cause damage if used too much. I was too old to be put out, but Arne came to watch me that night, his face showing concern and some fear as he settled down for his watch. He was a herdsman, and the loss of the large animals had affected him deeply. It would take the family years to build up the herd again, and it would never be the same. Much of our wealth had been wiped out that last night, the slain beasts unfit for eating or even offal, with the Demon-taint on them.

No one slept well that night, least of all me. I kept imagining the deaths of the animals, and somewhere in the night their screams became those of my family. I awoke, fear making my heart pound like horses' hooves. Arne was asleep in the big chair by the door, his new flintlock carbine lying across his lap. The first pale fingers of dawn were peeking through the cracks in the shutters, and we were safe for another night. I got up, and threw on the big wool cloak that had been my equinox gift. The house was still cool, with only the big fire downstairs going. I crept out past Arne, and down the stairs to the hall. Then I heard my uncle's voice, in low urgent tones.

Artwork by Jonathan Hunt

"You know it's the boy, Lars." Lars is my father, and head of the house. "We must send him to the priests, and they'll do what must be done." Even at eleven, I knew what he meant. To send someone to the priests is to send them to ritual sacrifice, to an ancient rite to appease Demons and the Old Gods of another time and place. My blood grew cold as the Ice, because I knew who he meant, and even then, I knew I didn't want to die.

Then my father's voice, low and rumbling, answered. "There is no proof it was he, Kerlo, and I'll not send one of my sons to those damned priests on the basis of your fears!"

"Then you damn us all to the Ice!" My uncle's voice was rising, getting louder and more fearful. "Damn you, Lars!"

"I rule this house, Kerlo! If you have a problem with that, you can just leave." There was, of course, no place for him to go. Anyone turned out of a household will not be accepted at another, save perhaps his wife's family's. Only my uncle's wife had died seven years ago, a victim of the Ice.

Of all the events of my childhood, that conversation sticks in my mind most firmly, for it presaged the events that were to decide the course of my life.

Uncle Kerlo shut up then, startled into silence by the threat of exile. But the damage had been done. All the adults, except Arne, dozing upstairs, had heard at least the last part of the talk, and were drawing their own conclusions. The most common one after that was that I was guilty, and my father was protecting me, as I was the last child of his first, and most beloved wife, who had died nine years before to a Na'harth arrow. I was shunned, no one willing to associate with me except for Papa and Arne. Arne surprised me that evening when he, out of nowhere, wrapped me up in a great big bear hug, like Papa used to do before Mama died.

The hug had a purpose besides reassurance, though. When his arms were around me, he slipped me a knife, and whispered "Keep that under thy pillow, pup, lest someone take matters into their own hands." And then he let me go, his big laugh echoing through the halls that had known no laughter for many days. And icy fear further gripped my heart. I was not safe even in the house of my father, I could never be safe.

When I was alone, later, I took the time to look at the knife. It was a long fighting blade, with angular runes running up the edges. Then I recognized it, tears swimming in my eyes. It was my mother's knife, the empowered blade that she had received fighting for the Fortress against the Na'harth, many years before. I hid it then, under my pillow, the knife's keen edge slicing its heavy linen at a mere touch.

That night, talk at the table was very quiet, almost non-existent. The family kept sneaking glances at either Papa, uncle Kerlo, or, eyes downcast in fear, at me. Mercifully, everyone went to bed early, save Papa and Arne. They stayed up by the fire, talking low with their heads close, the blaze of heartwood silhouetting them in the dimness of the Great Hall.

I slept poorly for much of that night, imagining every noise to be my uncle, coming to kill me in the night. Once awakening with a start, I saw Arne, standing by the door, his carbine in hand, the hammer and flint pulled back, waiting and watching, hidden in the shadows from anyone out in the small second-story hall leading to the children's dorm.

Arne slept for most of the next day, as did Papa. I stayed up in the dorm most of the time, avoiding the rest of the family. That evening, Arne brought me my supper, saying "The family is on the verge of asking Father to send you to Temple. Suspicious, superstitious fools. Don't worry, though." At this he reached out and tousled my hair. "We won't let anything happen to you." Then he got up and left, whistling tunelessly.

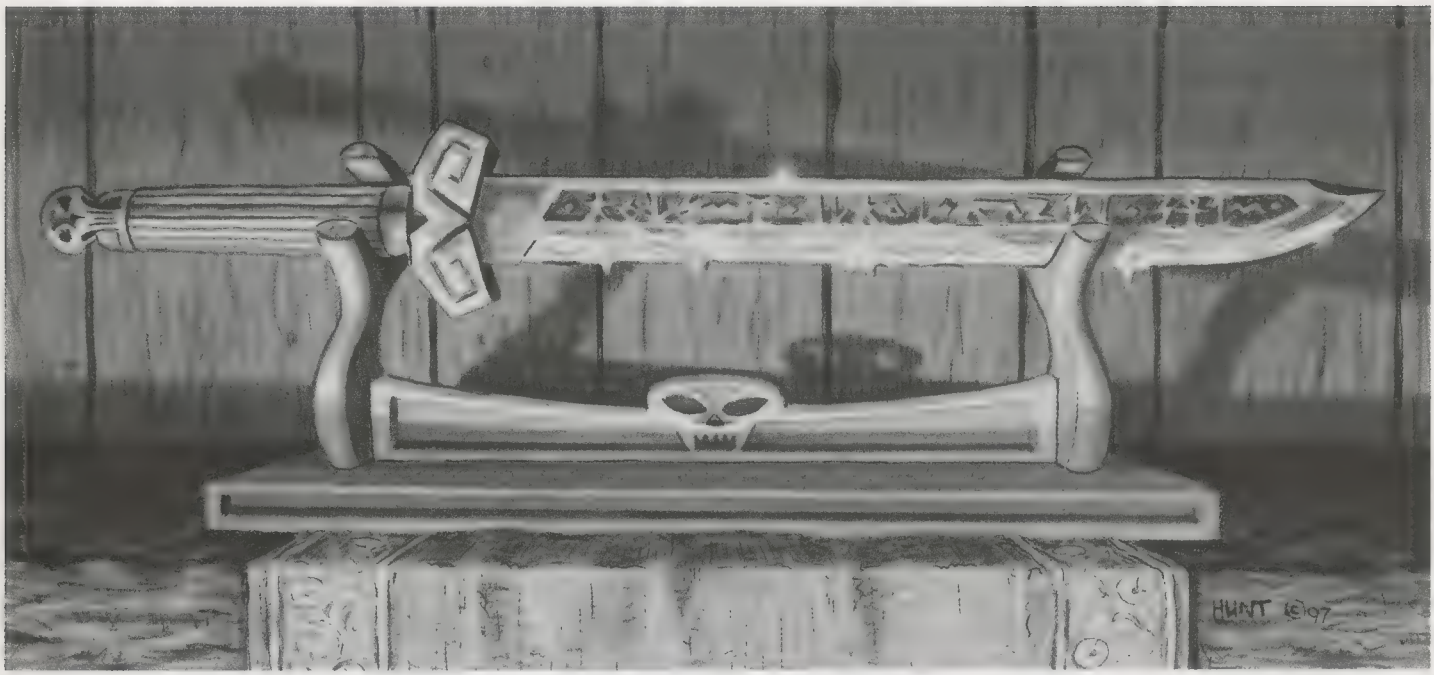
Let us in. Let us in. We want you. We NEED you! The Demons came that night, scratching at the shutters, clawing at the stopped-up chimneys. I couldn't sleep, especially with the little ones crying and screaming, struggling against the ties that held them in their beds. Arne was not at his customary place by the door, so I got up to leave. Then I noticed then Sten was not in his bed, either. There was no love lost between my uncle's son and me, but nonetheless I went in search of him. As I threw on the cloak, I picked up the knife from under my pillow, the crooked letters lining its blade seeming to glow in the faint light of the candles in the hall outside the room. Down the stairs I crept, trying to ignore the moans and cries of the Demons outside. As I passed the great hall, I could hear my father's low, growling voice and Arne's more pleasant tenor answering him. At least now I knew where they were.

From there I walked down the gatehall, towards the three sets of doors guarding entrance to my father's steading. I drew my cloak tighter around me as I left the great hall and its comforting fire and voices behind. To this day, I don't know what prompted me to go that way, away from the safety of the two men who would protect me, and into the darkness of the gatehall. A chill draught seemed to spring up from the corner of my mind, raising goose flesh over my body and pricking up the hair on my head. The gatehall comes to a 'T', with the main doors at the intersection. Off to either side are smaller doors, the wintergates. In the winter the main door is bolted fast and locked down, so only the two, smaller, wintergates could be used. As I got to the intersection, I could hear the Demons again, and the words froze my soul.

Yes. Yes. Yes young man-boy. Let us in. We love you. We need you. Open the bar and LET US IN!! The last was a roar that got me going again. For a brief, horrifying moment, I thought that the Demons were speaking to me through the warded doors of the maingate, the silver-and-lead seals glimmering and sparking in the far-off light of the heartwood fire. I poked my head around the intersection, looking toward first the right-hand wintergate, and then the left. At the end of the left-hand passage were Sten and his father, my uncle. Kerlo had a gun in one hand, a long pistol that he

Moving?

Your subscription copy of FANTASY Magazine will not be forwarded by the U.S. Post Office. If you don't send us a change of address notice, your issue will be delayed. We have even lost track of several subscribers entirely. Please send us a change of address as soon as you know it.



Artwork by Jonathan Hunt

must have stolen from the house armory. In the other he held a dim torch, the long-burning kind made by soaking reeds in tallow. He had the hammer on the pistol cocked back, the light from the torch glinting dully on the black steel of the barrel and the dull gray of the flint. My uncle had a loaded pistol pointed at his own son! Of all things I thought him capable of, this had never entered my mind.

Uncle Kerlo's voice seemed to hiss in the darkness. "Open the door, manboy. Let them in. I will survive, like the last time, when I rid myself of that useless hanger-on. The house will pass to me, the only one miraculously alive after some tormented fool of a boy opened a wintergate to the Ice. Try to exile me, will he? Open the door, whelp, or so help me I'll kill you myself!"

I ran then, ran for the great hall, and Arne and Papa and the fire and safety. As I left the gatehalls, I ran right into Arne leaving the great hall to start his patrol. The carbine was slung, and a flintlock pistol hung from his belt. Breathing raggedly, terrified, I told him what was happening at the wintergate. Before I had even finished, he was off at run, unslinging the carbine as he went. I ran along behind him, my shorter strides making me fall farther and farther behind. Arne rounded the corner to the left-hand wintergate, and I heard yelling and cursing, and over it all, an awful booming, the pounding of Ice Demons at the gates.

To this day, I cannot remember what happened right then, but I do remember the awful crashing sound of gunfire. Two shots. In those days, gunpowder was extremely rare, created by the Fortress in only small quantities, something about a lack of sulfur in the world called Winter. So rare that it was only used for defensive purposes, not for hunting or target-shooting. That was the first time I had ever heard shots fired. I rounded the corner, shortly after the shots, to see Arne sprawled on the floor, an awful, dark blood pooling around him from a shot in the belly, redly reflecting the light of my uncle's torch, fallen to the ground. His left arm still clutched the torch. Looking up the hall, I could see uncle Kerlo, his face distorted with rage, a smoking pistol hanging from his right arm. Of his left arm, there was nothing left but a bloody stump. Then Sten removed the last bar on the door.

Immediately, the door seemed to explode inwards. Sten got out of the way of the door, but found himself right in front of the Ice Demon that came streaming in, vapor pouring off it. That was the first time I had ever actually seen a Demon, for to see one means that it can see you too, and that meant Death. It looked like thick fog, with icicles, snow and sleet swirling around within. Sometimes those icicles seemed to form hands or claws or sometimes even a face, a lonely, alien face, twisted by hunger and regret, hatred and sorrow. A tendril of fog reached out for Sten, who seemed transfixed by the horror he had released into the household. Then, just before it enveloped him, he screamed, a shriek of pure terror. Then he was gone, hidden in the icy mist of the Demon. Uncle Kerlo started to move then, to shuffle away. The man had enormous strength, to keep on his feet, blood pouring from the mangled stump of his left arm, let alone move. The Demon slid along after him, leaving Sten standing there, rimed in frost. Kerlo raised the pistol then, as though to threaten the Demon. He hadn't reloaded, so it was merely a bluff, a useless one, for firearms do nothing to a Demon. The Demon reacted as if it were real, though, sending a shaft of ice as thick as a man's leg out of itself and into Kerlo's head. Blood sprayed and froze, as Kerlo's body just hung there, suspended from that great spear. Then his body dropped, shattering into a thousand pieces as it hit the stone floor. I was next. And there was nothing I could do.

Then I remembered the knife, the enchanted silver knife that had once belonged to my mother, the knife that had been a gift from the Fortress. I pulled it out, thinking about all the lessons Arne had given me the summer before on throwing a knife, like he knew that I would need the skill some day. I hefted the knife as the Demon started to flow down the hall towards me, trying to get a feel for its balance. Points of ice like upturned icicles sprouted on the edge of the fog as it raced towards me, and snow blanketed the floor three

inches thick around it. I threw the knife, uttering a prayer to the Fortress as I let fly. Sleet blasted from it towards me, freezing me numb.

The knife struck the Demon dead-centre, and it stopped as if frozen itself, suspended in a miniature storm raging in my father's gatehall. A sad, tired face seemed to look at me from out of the mist, and then the Demon exploded in shards of ice and stinging sleet. That was the last that I remembered of that night.

Apparently Papa had arrived just after my attack on the lead Demon, and was able to get the wintergate shut and barred again before another entered. I was credited with saving the entire household. Arne recovered, but he was never the big strong man I remembered, the savage wound giving him pain for the rest of his days. Our house was never bothered by Demons after that night. Even on those terrible nights during the four greatyears of the Endless Winter, when all were shut in, Demons left my father's house alone. Never before, or again, in the history of the men who had settled on Winter was there a time when a human had destroyed an Ice Demon.

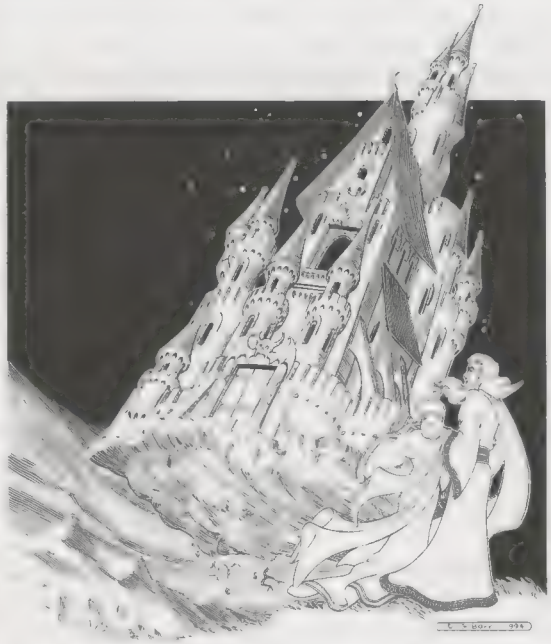
When I turned twelve, the Fortress claimed me, and trained me in the ways of a Warlock. These past ninety years I have served the Fortress, and all humanity, with my Power and the Power I channel from the Heart of Humanity. Now, at long last, my strength is failing me, and I will not last long. Soon, I shall go to face my judgment. Before I go, I just wanted to make sure that someone knew what had started me on this weary path that I have trod for so very long.

If you look over there, on my mantelpiece, you will see my mother's knife, recovered after that night. Even now, nine decades later, it is still rimed with frost.

❄

Colin Dunn grew up in northern Alberta and attended the University of Alberta, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Geography. He spent several years wandering around various parts of western Canada and now resides near his birthplace in northern Alberta on an acreage with a horse, two-and-a-half dogs (two husky-crosses and a poodle-cross), and a large, self-satisfied tabby cat named Punk. He currently works as a teaching assistant, in computers, in the very same high school that he spent three years plotting to get out of. This is his first published story.

Jonathan Hunt usually works in collaboration with his wife, Lisa. They are professional illustrators and writers. Their children's books are published by Simon & Schuster and theyhave also contributed illustrations to *Asimov's*, *Analog*, *Cricket*, *Haunts*, and Llewellyn books.



MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY Magazine

T-shirt!

The artwork on the front is George Barr's line drawing of a flying castle, based on the cover of issue #1. The back lists every artist and author published and/or interviewed in the first twenty-five issues. Printed in white on a heavyweight black Tshirt, sizes M - L - XL - XXL - XXXL. These make great gifts!

$16.95 includes shipping and handling within the U.S. (Canada: $1.50 additional. Please make checks payable in U.S. funds.) Checks payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley.

Yes! Send my T-shirt right away!

Size: ☐ M ☐ L ☐ XL ☐ XXL ☐ XXXL

XXXL NOW IN STOCK!!

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip, Country _____

☐ Check enclosed ☐ Visa/MC info below

acct.no: _____ exp: _____

signature: _____

The Write Class

by Steven Piziks

The English department bulletin board announced a new class: *Creative Writing Seminar — Novel*. Intrigued, I stopped to read the posting more closely. Looked pretty cool — I could get credit toward my major *and* have an excuse for all the time I was spending at the keyboard.

"Taking the class?" asked a friendly voice. I turned to see a tall, striking woman behind me. She was towing a small two-wheeled cart with a pile of books and a shoulder bag strapped to it.

"I might," I replied, shifting my shabby little backpack. "I've sold three short stories and I've just started a book."

"Oh? I'm teaching the course. What do you write?"

"Fantasy and science fiction."

The change was amazing. Her nose tilted upward and her voice frosted like a root beer glass. "Well. I really don't think *that* kind of writing belongs in a college seminar. We strive for something more literary and worthwhile."

"Really?" I gushed. "How wonderful? You know, I've been trying so hard to stop writing interesting stories that sell to professional markets and start writing *artistic* stories that just — you know — *wrench* the soul."

Well, actually I didn't say that. That reply didn't come to me until several minutes after the professor had strolled away. I was secretly hoping her nose-in-the-air posture would cause her to crash into a door or something, but it didn't.

I decided not to take the class.

Does all this mean creative writing courses are worthless? Not at all. It just means you have to screen them very carefully, especially if you're paying for them.

What can a creative writing course do for you? Plenty, if you find a good one. If you have trouble motivating yourself to write, a good class can force you to develop better habits. You didn't finish that story? Watch out for falling grades? You didn't notice that your protagonists always have no personal problems, no backgrounds, and no life? Or that your plots are predictable? Or that your settings never contain sensory information? A good writing teacher will point out such flaws and help you correct them.

A good writing class also provides someone who will read and react to your work. Editors rarely give more feedback than a xeroxed rejection letter or a xeroxed contract. Good teachers, on the other hand, will tell you exactly what they like and what they don't. It's very satisfying to get back a story with "nice description here" or "I like this character" or even "hee hee hee" written in red on the margin.

The steps you take before signing up for a creative writing class are the same for both high school and college. First, keep in mind that such classes are rarely geared toward professional publication. Don't be at all surprised to find yourself in a roomful of students who would never consider mailing a manuscript to a professional editor and will be amazed that you have the courage. Many will be there because they figure it's a blow-off class, an easy A. Whether it is or not, of course, depends on the teacher.

The teacher will also probably know little about submission and publication. Most of the time, writing teachers "only" have degrees in English and are not professional writers, so only rarely will they know anything about researching markets or formatting mansucripts. This doesn't, however, mean that they can't help you learn to write.

Obviously, then you next need to track down the teacher and find out something about the specific class. Is it a workshop in which everyone reads everyone's stories and critiques them? Or will only the teacher read your writing? Are grades assigned according to what the teacher thinks is "good" writing, according to how much you improve during the class, or according to something else? What will you have to write? Stories? Poems? Plays? Non-fiction? A little bit of everything?

Another important factor to know before signing up is if the teacher puts restrictions on genre. Some, like the snobby professor I met all those years ago, are obviously looking only for "artistic" (read, "incomprehensible") fiction. Others will happily let you do anything you want. But do note that limitations aren't always bad. A teacher who says, "Try another genre for this next assignment and see how you do" is trying to stretch you, not imprison you.

Finally, specifically mention that you want to write fantasy and science fiction. How does the teacher react? With pleasure? Puzzlement? Dismay? Disgust? The latter is unfortunately all too common. In that case, you may want to find another instructor or avoid the class altogether.

If, however, you still want (or need) the course but don't want to risk your report card over literary snobbery, check into taking the class for credit/no-credit (sometimes known as "pass/fail" or "satisfactory/unsatisfactory"). That way, you can get the instruction and the credit, but it won't hurt your grade point average. Just be prepared to fight for your genre's honor.

Not all literary snobs, incidentally, are permanently snobbish. Although I decided against the novel writing course, I did look into a class called *Creative Writing — Fiction*.

When I went to interview the professor, he told me straight off that he didn't like science fiction or fantasy.

"To be honest," he said apologetically, "I don't see much value in that type of writing. I also won't be able to help you make sure your material is appropriate for your genre. You might want to take another course."

I decided to take the class anyway. This prof was honest without being cold or snobby. I also didn't need help with the magical or scienctific aspects of my writing; I needed help with my flat, stale characters. I also needed the credit, and a creative writing class would be a welcome break from all the lit classes I was currently sweating through. And I do enjoy the occasional...debate on the merits of F/SF.

On the other hand, however, I didn't want to jeopardize my GPA over another prof's literary prejudice. So I regis-

tered the course for credit/no-credit.

Three weeks into the course, I submitted my first story. That's when I discovered something — a few years ago, the professor had had a student who insisted on writing *Star Trek* ripoffs and Conan the Barbarian pastiches. This, he had assumed, was what fantasy and science fiction were all about.

"But if this is science fiction," the prof said during the critique of my mansucript, "then I really need to get out there and read more of it."

A nice ego boost. I would have had an A in the class, too, but by then it was too late to change the credit/no credit deal back into a grade. (Mutter mutter grumble gripe.)

So. You've talked to the teacher, decided you can get along well, and signed up for the course. Now what?

At this point, everyone's experiences will be different, depending on the course and the teacher's vision. You already, of course, know something about all this because you talked to the teacher before even signing up. However, things do occasionally go wrong. Perhaps you got the wrong impression about the teacher's attitude toward F/SF. Or perhaps the schedule changes unexpectedly and the person you talked to isn't the one who ends up teaching the course. Or perhaps you got a low grade on a piece and you very much disagree.

Solution? Open, ***polite*** communication. Make an appointment and talk to the teacher about the problem. See what you can work out. Perhaps the teacher made an honest mistake. Or perhaps the teacher will allow a re-write. The key here, however, is to be *polite*. Most (not all, but most) teachers are well aware that writing is not an exact science and that there is room for debate in grading the stuff. But snide remarks, curled lips, and snippy insults won't get you very far. As a teacher myself, I'm continually amazed at how few of my students seem to know this.

Above all, don't forget that once the story has been through the class, it's time to send it to an editor. A teacher can scribble a comment on a story, but only an editor can scribble a signature on a contract.

— Steven Piziks

The Write Software

by Ann Sharp

In the great days of fairy tales and fantasy fiction, wizards were easy to identify. Who else wore such luxuriant robes, so heavily embroidered, ornamented with mysterious symbols in metallic thread (a useful crib if one forgot something important in the middle of a major incantation!)...poring over books of spells and laboring to produce great things.

These days the wizard can't be told from anyone else...on the street, if any walk the streets these days. They're in a peaceful spot somewhere — writing code. Their output isn't alchemical gold, it's computer programs. Some of the programs are the sort of thing we expect a computer to do, and do well: dictionaries (the **OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY**, the ultimate English-language reference, is now on one CD-ROM disk, instead of twenty-eight volumes in a bookcase; encyclopedias, now with pictures and sound, are available at the touch of a key), style manuals, thesauri, rhyming dictionaries for poets, spell-check programs, grammar-checking programs; programs which assist users in writing poetry, or humor, or which compare the user's composition to a corporate standard — all sorts of goodies. Many of these are now taken for granted; they come as a part of any serious word-processing program, or they will in its next version. However, I have discovered some very interesting programs (not fancy-font programs to make terrible writing, including mine, look better than it is) out there — programs for writers.

For instance, if your ordinary word processing program is Microsoft Word, you can add on a module which will reorganize your file into proper script format, setting up the correct layout, breaking up the whole into scenes, and so on. It will advise you about the structure of your scenes, too — apparently a television show is divided up into seven segments and a final climax, and the structure for these is predictable (cast in stone, by the sponsor, to keep people watching commercials, I bet). There are also a couple of specific script-writing word processing programs.

If you've visited a discount software outlet, you already know that I could review new programs until we ran out of time, paper, and patience — so I've limited myself here to the most interesting programs to me, "plot assistance" for straight fiction:

We all know the skeleton of a good story (now, if someone will just rhyme it and set it to a catchy tune, we'll be all set): It's about

> a **sympathetic character**
> overcomes **almost-impossible odds**
> by **his or her own efforts**
> to **achieve a worthwhile goal**.

I've acquired a computer program, **WritePro**, that uses the computer's attributes to focus any creative writing ability one may happen to have on the important story elements. It directs one to write in ways that specifically focus on the "elements" of a good — i.e., saleable — plot.

The basic premise of this program is that you begin with someone (your leading character) who has to want something badly. That starts your plot. If the character is a good choice, he/she may well want something very different from what you might want. It is easier to write objectively about someone who is not like you.

Next, every hero needs a villain (who needn't necessarily be "bad"), preferably a person, preferably someone involved with the heroine's life before the story began. (Why is Rich-

ard keeping Bernadette from moving into the sinister castle she's inherited from her godfather?)

Next, suspense: surprises create suspense...the best kind of surprise is an unexpected obstacle, and, as your story continues, the obstacles should be greater and greater. Perhaps something unusual and unexpected happens in a very ordinary environment. ("There I was, fixing tuna salad for lunch, when a space ship landed in the back yard....") **Why** did the character do what he did?

Next, action: Readers look forward to the action of a scene, and are more interested in an active hero or heroine than a passive one. (Remember **I WILL FEAR NO EVIL**, where the characters sat around inside Eunice's brain theorizing about their sex lives, while endless opportunities to explore the possibilities of the situation were wasted?) Therefore, show, don't tell; use dialogue as much as possible to convey immediacy. Let the reader see something visual on every page. (One romance writer whose output averaged one book a month for several years — *not* Barbara Cartland, either — produced better-than-standard category novels and explained that she ran the scenes through her head as if they were film or stage sets.). Keep your characters on stage by writing immediate scenes whenever possible.

Next, description: don't waste it; it should move the story along. If it's a detailed description from a character's point of view, there should be a reason: perhaps the locale is new to the character or something significant has changed (one presumes the corpse on the sofa was not a conversation piece planned by the interior decorator?).

This program prompts you to follow its rules, step by step, to create a sympathetic character and his/her worthwhile goal, then to add in the almost-impossible odds. After looking at a situation from several points of view, you compare what you first wrote with your most recent improvement. Eventually you hope to have the basic components together, needing only fleshing out and (well, **we** said so first) lots of rewriting. Lots!

Marion agreed with the "Rules", though she hasn't actually tried the program.

Collaborator is arranged to produce a story outline with characters, settings, a series of plot complications and crises, all leading to a climax and resolution. It asks the user questions: What's the title? who is the protagonist? who is the antagonist? what is their conflict? Then it wants a concise description of the beginning, middle, and end of the story. It asks a series of questions which force the user to examine the story in *excruciating* detail. **Collaborator** is intended to collaborate with you, solving problems in your story construction and analysis, and it centers on the basics of storytelling (its standard is Aristotle and his six elements of drama, and its Key Questions keep you focused on the Who and What and Where and When and Why and How of your character's pursuit of the worthwhile goal.

StoryLine is probably aimed at screen writing, but it seems perfectly workable for manuscript writing, too. There are all kinds of interesting special features: a Premise Pad which manages your story ideas; a Deep Sequence feature which leads you through to whatever the story's really about; a Conflict Map which shows you exactly how the conflicts which drive the story are related, Action Tracks which track (up to ten) sequences of action; 22 Steps which keeps track of the twenty-two steps of every great story; Revelation Sequence (keep track of what your hero and the audience know at any given moment in the plot); Moral Sequence to trace the hero's rise and fall; and a Scene Outline (to keep track of every scene of your story, which you will certainly need after trying to keep track of all the rest of this! No, actually there's no reason why a computer shouldn't be keeping track of all this; after all, do *I* have 640K of memory for these details? Note: **StoryLine** is one of the few plotting programs available for both Mac and PC.

Plots Unlimited is fun. It is based, more or less, on an old (1930s) book called **PLOTTO** (Erle Stanley Gardner used **PLOTTO**, not for his central Perry Mason plots, but for the subsidiary plots — the ones Paul Drake was always explaining in a moment or two on the telephone), but the set-up is much better suited to a computer program. You start out with a combination of characters (A, your hero; B, your heroine; and A-5, a male criminal), or a story type (Romance, Mystery, Crime/Immorality, Mistaken Judgment, Obligation, etc.), or a conflict situation (A, by ESP, learns of a terrible danger threatening B, the woman he loves).

The program lets you assign names to your characters — A is Fred, B is Deborah, and A-5 is Sinistro, let's say — whereupon these names will be substituted for the A, B, A-5 characters. Pretty soon your computer screen shows a center

The Results of the Cauldron

Stories:

- 1st Place: **"The Knife That Makes Men" by Mary C. Aldridge**
- 2nd Place: **"A Slow Day in Hell" by Julia S. Mandala**
- 3rd Place: **"The Chiromancer" by Jacqueline M. Shank**

Artwork:

- 1st Place: **Alicia Austin for "The Knife That Makes Men"**
- 2nd Place: **Armand Cabrera for "Portrait of My Wife"**
- 3rd Place: **George Barr for "Those Who Would Be King"**

Congratulations to all the winners! To vote for your favorites in *this* issue, use the ballot on page 64.

window displaying a conflict: "Fred, by ESP, learns of a terrible danger threatening Deborah, the woman he loves." And above that center window is a window informing you that you have several lead-ins, or actions showing how Fred might arrive at the center conflict; below that center window is another similar window informing you that you have several lead-outs, or logical series of actions for Fred and/or Deborah to take. You choose one of the lead-outs and it moves to the center window...you have the idea.

You save the sequence of actions you've chosen to a text editor, and eventually you have your plot. You can start at the beginning, the middle, or the end, wherever your original inspiration belongs. You have plenty of viewing and editing options. I have only one criticism of this program: the "B" characters (women) in **Plots Unlimited** are mostly rather dependent, clinging, and even stupid, so if what you have in mind is a *Sword and Sorceress* heroine, you will probably have to name the "A" character "Wendy" and change gender throughout the text editor's notes, which is easy enough to do. **Plots Unlimited** is as addictive as an unabridged thesaurus; you start out with something short and simple in mind, and surface hours later because you can't resist setting up plots, and more plots, and sub-plots, and backstory plots!

First Aid for Writers: Brought to us by the same people who came up with **WritePro**, this one is not intended to structure your story before you settle down to writing it; as the name suggests, it's for fixing up things after you notice they're not right. It has sections on beginnings, descriptions, character, plotting, pace, backstory and plot backstory, and so on, to revisions of all sorts, and two sections on writing the erotic scene — one of the trickiest scenes to do well! Does the story seem written from the outside? or does it seem familiar? Are scenes ordinary instead of fresh? Do characters seem to lack a credible history? Does the work interest friends, agents, editors — or doesn't it? Is the title as good as it should be? All these things are dissected so you can see for yourself where your story could use a BandAid or two. Luckily, not only are stories stronger after they're mended, but the cracks disappear completely!

StoryBuilder is especially well suited to the writer who has read one hundred thousand stories in his or her favorite genre and has finally concluded, "I could write a better story than that!" Most genres — science fiction, fantasy, mystery, romance, Western — and many types of stories are included, with the essential points of many sub-genres.

Example: ***Ghost in the Machine**: With advanced computers and artificial intelligence, it might be possible to 'encode' people, living or dead, into software which acts just as the person would under given circumstances.*

Even though I'm busy this morning, I could almost stop what I'm doing to develop that into a story... just think of the political implications! More generally, StoryBuilder includes detailed points of the Adventure, Ascent/Descent, Discovery, Escape, Forbidden Love, Hero's Journey, Immoderation, Love, Metamorphosis, Mystery, Pursuit, Quest, Rescue, Revenge, Rivalry, Sacrifice, Temptation, Three Act Play, Transformation, Underdog, and W-Diagram plots. If your brain slows down at any point, you can stimulate it by scrolling through handy lists of twists and turns, obstacles, or climactic scenes "Hero remembers what he's forgotten," or "Protagonist comes to her senses." If, at some point, you decide that **StoryBuilder** left out a scene, or a new sub-genre that you invented, or you want to add in a really good alien name you've invented for a character, these can easily be added to the TOOLS.INI file and you can customize the program yourself. **StoryBuilder** is what I would call a "plot organizer" program — it reminds you of where you start, where you're going, and what squares on the board you need to land on between the beginning and the end.

Any discussion of plotting software would be incomplete without **Dramatica**, newest and most dramatic of the programs. Dramatica is based on a different theory than other plotting programs, that of the Argument. The plot of the story, goes the theory, describes the internal logic or sequence of events that lead the characters from their situations and attitudes at the beginning of the problem to changed situations and attitudes when the effort to solve the problem is over. **Dramatica** distinguishes between a Tale — a sequence of events that lead to success or failure — and a Story, which is defined as the author's Argument that there is only one right way to solve the problem.

You answer a series of multiple-choice questions about your story, **Dramatica** fits your answers together like a jigsaw puzzle. then guides you through the intricacies of characters, their functions in the plot, and the interlocking of these functions. Every complete Story is a model of the mind's problem-solving process. Solutions, successful or not, are illustrated by the activities of the Main Character, who must either change to accommodate the solution to the problem, or, if on the right track, must stick it out.

For a Story to be satisfactory, the audience must appreciate its two major views: the Objective view of the general on the hilltop, which must focus on the events as they unfold; and the Main Character's Subjective view from the trenches, which is emotionally involved and committed — especially as it bumps into the Obstacle and must decide What to Do, and eventually commit to a Leap of Faith that the decision was the right one. Is the Cost of the commitment worth risking for the Reward? From the Main Character's view, are the costs, the dividends, the goals, and the consequences in dynamic balance?

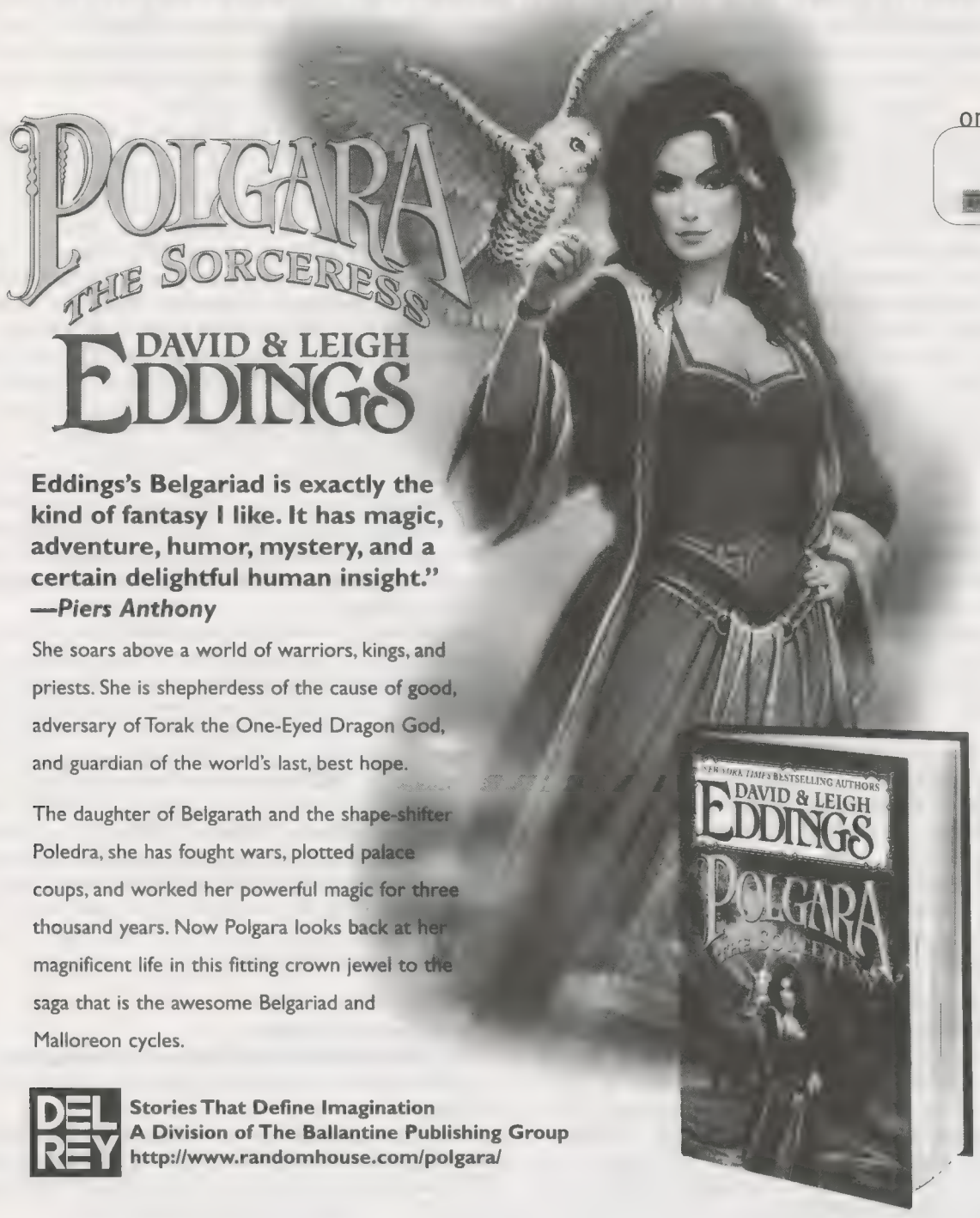
Dramatica is a complete departure from other plotting programs and is based on a new theory. Many words are used in slightly different ways than we're accustomed to. Therefore, this program has a steeper learning curve than others — you aren't learning just the keystrokes, you need to learn the theory as well, and the theory is not obvious to the first-time user. I like **Dramatica** very much, but I would do better with it if I took a formal class, or at least a seminar, with a good instructor. This said, I think it's a valuable way to look at story construction, and using Dramatica properly will aid and encourage more complete plotting and a better understanding of the skeleton of a good story. Once a **Dramatica** Argument is complete, your plot will be well-begun on a firm foundation.

Visit:
StarComp Plot Assistants
http://www.leonardo.net/starcomp/plots.html
(on-line source for plotting programs and other writers' software)

All of these goodies can be obtained at reasonably discounted prices through The Writers' Computer Store, at 11317 Santa Monica Boulevard, West Los Angeles, California, 90025 — write for further information.

— *Ann Sharp*

TWO OF FANTASY'S MOST POPULAR MASTERS CONJURE ONE OF MAGIC'S MOST POWERFUL MISTRESSES FOR A MOST PHENOMENAL SERIES FINALE!



Eddings's Belgariad is exactly the kind of fantasy I like. It has magic, adventure, humor, mystery, and a certain delightful human insight."
—Piers Anthony

She soars above a world of warriors, kings, and priests. She is shepherdess of the cause of good, adversary of Torak the One-Eyed Dragon God, and guardian of the world's last, best hope.

The daughter of Belgarath and the shape-shifter Poledra, she has fought wars, plotted palace coups, and worked her powerful magic for three thousand years. Now Polgara looks back at her magnificent life in this fitting crown jewel to the saga that is the awesome Belgariad and Malloreon cycles.

DEL REY
Stories That Define Imagination
A Division of The Ballantine Publishing Group
http://www.randomhouse.com/polgara/

Letters

Tia Ahnjade MacLlyr, Hartford CT

I would like to extend to you and your staff my sincere thanks for the most courteous treatment I have received from any editor/staff in my brief experience. I have only recently submitted my fiction for consideration and can not yet invest in an agent to shop my work.

Largely, I've blundered. Committed strings of faux pas long enough to rope walk to Fiji, with door after door slammed shut in my face (or anything else not out of harm's way). A manuscript was sent to you in care of DAW Books, NY. Within two weeks, it was returned to me from your office in California complete with instructions for proper form and etc. ...as I had completely fouled those elements from page one, but was encouraged to try again.

Thank you. It is not merely enough for writers (aspiring or proven) to be whacked on the nose for "doing wrong" ... your team was the first to help me understand *what* was wrong, and hopefully, correct it. Thanks for not being merely an editor, but an educator.

George Barr, Livermore CA

Enclosed are the illustrations you requested for Richard Purtill's "The Isle of Despair". I hope they meet with your satisfaction.

I actually did the assignment twice. I get random attacks of insufferable artiness occasionally and come off like I'm trying to impress the readers of *Psychology Today*. This time I guess I thought it would be neat-o keen to illustrate the story as if the pictures were painted on antique Greek pottery: a cracked plate and a fractured urn. I copied the ancient style, gave it nice Greek-key-design borders and all, and found myself looking at exactly that: pretentious approximations of something I probably wouldn't really have liked that much if it were *genuine*.

I had sudden audio visions of my fellow illustrators saying, "Get *him*! Who is it he's trying to be *this* month?"

I've learned to trust that inner voice that tells me to back up a little and take stock of the situation. So I started over. I'm pleased with the result — a little stylized, perhaps, but a good deal more straightforward and honest.

I didn't call because I was afraid you'd say: "Oh, send them. I'd like to see them." And I probably would have... and have regretted it.

Leigh Husband Kimmel, Carbondale IL

Congratulations to all of you on yet another excellent issue. I thoroughly enjoyed every single story in it, as well as the editorial and columns. I think that your magazine is the only one to which I subscribe that I regularly read from cover to cover solely for pleasure, and only then come back to reread and study for writing craft purposes. (Unfortunately there are several major magazines in the industry, whom I shall leave unnamed out of professional courtesy, whose stories I have to force myself to read in order to study them.)

This is the main reason that I have never voted in the Cauldron. How could I possibly select a first, second, and third best from so many excellent stories? Each is wonderful in its own way, which makes comparing them very difficult. Can one really compare a lighthearted piece like "Opportunity Scratches" or "A Proliferation of Potatoes" (and I loved the magical use for a potato's "eyes") with a chilling one like "Temple of Stone" or "The Rose, the Rich Man and Mother Berchte"? Or how about "Aisha Awakened", which combined humorous elements with some serious magical menace?

I also enjoyed Laura J. Underwood's latest tale of Anwyn and Glynnanis, and hope that they will be returning to the pages of this magazine in a few more issues. And I found "Maiden Phoenix" very touching, although I have to confess that I missed the point of the ending the first time I read it. I sat there trying to figure out what in heaven's name the author was trying to pull by suggesting that Oberon called King Arthur back to life to fight in the Napoleonic Wars — until I recalled the name of the Duke of Wellington, Arthur Wellesley. (I've always been partial to his naval counterpart, Admiral Lord Nelson.) Both India Edghill and her sister have a talent for writing poignant tales of love and sacrifice.

And thank you, Ms. Sharp, for your excellent article on avoiding stereotypes and clichés. I think that every beginning writer for some reason has to rewrite all the major clichéd plots in the business — the deal with the devil, the time travel story, the alien invasion story, the final exam for mages story, etc. And even after that's done, it's still sometimes a struggle to distinguish between clichéd elements and original ones, since one has to play one's originality within a framework of storytelling. I'm still struggling with that one.

Again, thank you for yet another wonderful issue of *FANTASY Magazine*. I'm already looking forward to #36.

You're very welcome indeed. — MZB

Eric Yetman, Tucson AZ

I must ask you a question. One of your guidelines is unclear to me. Recently I sent you an alternate world fantasy, and you sent me a rejection letter stating that "I do not feel that either God or the Devil is a suitable character" for the magazine.

I'm confused, because the Jewish/Christian/Islamic God does not appear in the story. Old Scratch isn't in the story either. There are three deities in the storyl; they're gods and goddesses of that world.

Here's what I need to know — do you not want stories with gods of any kind? I need to know so that I don't send you similar stories. Thanks for your time.

I'm afraid the editors must simply claim their prerogative to be picky on this one. — REH

Jan Combs, Wichita KS

I certainly hope that India Edghill is being facetious when she describes herself as owning too many books on too many subjects. Any book dragon or tome griffin knows that there is no such thing as too many books, just too little reading time.

Entirely true! — REH

An Interview With Octavia E. Butler

by Steven Piziks

Octavia Butler is a tall, majestic woman of great talent, author of novels, short stories, and essays, and a recent winner of the prestigious Macarthur Award. Her works have won the Hugo and Nebula awards; her titles include the novels **KINDRED** and **WILD SEED**, and the collection **BLOODCHILD**. This interview was conducted at the 1997 Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' Workshop in Lansing, Michigan.

MZBFM: You're a Clarion survivor.

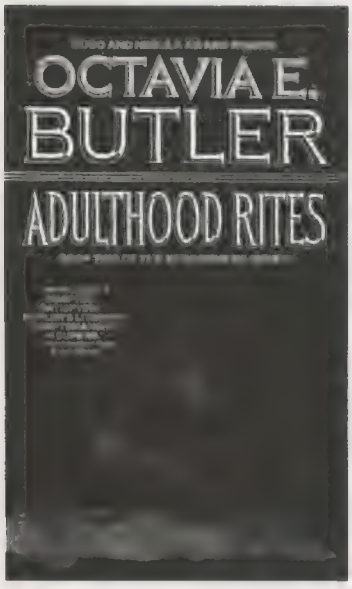
Octavia E. Butler: [laughing] No, no. I am a Clarion *alumnus*.

MZBFM: And now you're teaching it.

Octavia E. Butler: Yes. I taught here in East Lansing in 1989, and I've done a couple of Clarion Wests in Seattle. I was a student in Clarion, Pennsylvania, in 1970. Robin Scott Wilson started the whole thing in Pennsylvania and brought the Clarion workshop with him when he moved to Michigan.

Back when you were a student, did you ever think you might end up teaching at Clarion?

I never really thought about it. My big deal when I was a student was to get published. I was desperate to get published. I'd been sending stuff out since I was thirteen, and it had been coming back since I was thirteen. I was kind of tired of this by the time I was 23, so when Harlan Ellison mentioned Clarion, I was eager. Actually, I was both eager and terrified. Mostly terrified.



Mostly terrified?

Yeah. I'd never been out of California except over the border to Mexicali. I'd never been anywhere alone, and all of a sudden I was going to go cross-country by myself. It was scary. And I was also going to go to a little, tiny town up in the hills of Pennsylvania with one radio station that played Perry Como records. I knew absolutely nobody and everything was ninety miles from what I called civilization. I'm not sure if you consider Pittsburgh civilization. [laughs] Sorry if you're from there.

I'm not. I do know that two groups from the Society for Creative Anachronism fight over Pittsburgh.

Well, no — they fight and the *loser* gets Pittsburgh. [general laughter]

Photo by Miriam Berkley

What was your reaction when you were first invited to teach at Clarion West?

I didn't know whether I could do it — I had plans to fly to Peru to research my Xenogenesis books. But the dates worked out so that I would just be able to get home, wash and iron my clothes, and come out again covered in bug bites.

Oh dear.

Well, I was in the Amazon. Everything eats human flesh down there. So when I got to Clarion Wet, I was tired and itchy, and my feet were all swollen. I was tired enough so that I almost didn't care when I got there. This was a good thing, because otherwise I would've been petrified. I mean, intellectually I cared, but emotionally, forget it.

How was your experience different from when you were a Clarion student and when you became a Clarion teacher?

Seattle was quite different from Clarion, Pennsylvania. Seattle is an honest-to-God city that I like. I don't like most cities, to tell the truth, but Seattle is — or was at that time — still a very livable place. I don't know how it is now. I can remember going on long walks when I had time. I'd been to Seattle before and I knew I liked it.

You've often said that you don't consider yourself a science fiction writer, but what you write happens to be considered science fiction.

What I usually say is that I don't worry about the genre. It's a marketing device and I let other people worry about that. I mean, some of what I write could be classified as science fiction and some of it couldn't. For instance, **KINDRED** is not science fiction, but it gets put next to the other science fiction because I wrote it. I have a feeling that if I wrote a biography about my mother, it would wind up in the science fiction section.

You've also won a MacArthur Prize. Tell us about that.

Cover artwork by John Jude Palencar

A total stranger called me on the phone to tell me that I had been granted a MacArthur Fellowship and that I would be receiving checks which would total about $289,000, which was very nice. It was stretched over five years, though. It's less impressive that way than if they just handed it to you all at once. On the other hand, the tax man takes a slightly lesser bite.

What is the grant for?

It's a grant that comes out of the air. You can't apply for it. You don't know that your name has been put in. And unless the person who has put in your name wants to tell you, you don't know who that is. I have my suspicions, but I don't know for sure. I think it's the idea that you should be able to go on doing the work that you're doing, that someone finds value in what you do and thinks you should get this grant.

What was your reaction when you found out about it?

I didn't quite believe it. I didn't know whether the call was on the level. She was a very nice-sounding woman, but when you don't enter contests and somebody calls you and says you've won a — they say you've won, and all you have to do is give them your social security number and your credit card number, and — mmm hmmmm.

In "Positive Obsession" — one of the essays in ***BLOODCHILD*** *— you said that your aunt once told you that blacks can't be writers.*

Yeah. It was a long time ago. Actually she said that Negroes can't be writers.

Have you faced similar comments from other people since then? Or now?

Not that kind of comment. That was just an absolute statement. There's not much you can do with a statement like that except choose not to believe it. But what I've found is that there are still kids — black kids — who don't see the possibilities. They assume that if they don't see anybody around them doing something, it can't be done — at least, not by them. It's a pity.

You said you started submitting at age thirteen. That's a young age to start sending out manuscripts. What got you started on the road to professional writing instead of just writing for yourself?

I wouldn't have known how to submit, except I found a copy of *The Writer* on the bus. Because of the title, I took an interest and I took it home to read. A bit later, when I was allowed in the adult department of the library, I was able to find other writer's magazines. They had a lot of information about writing and how to submit and all that, but I had found out the basic stuff in that first *Writer*. I've always had a good feeling toward them for that. I was at that time also buying *Amazing*, *Fantastic*, *Galaxy*, and *Fantasy & Science Fiction* from the grocery store. My mother would go to the store and I would buy these magazines for whatever they were — thirty-five or fifty cents. [laughs] Oh, those were the days!

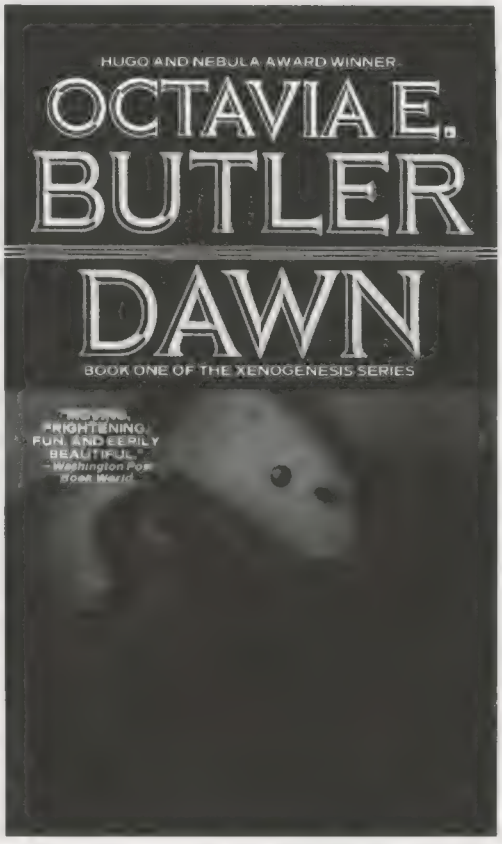
I remember when comic books were twelve cents.

I remember when they were a dime and fifty-two pages long. I still have some. My mother went through a fit of motherliness and tore a lot of them in half.

Oh!

That was pretty much my reaction. I got home and they were neatly ripped in two. It was punishment. I hadn't picked up my room, and she never really approved of them anyway, so here was a way to kill two birds with one stone.

I wasn't aware of it, but there was a lot of talk, back in — I guess it was the late fifties, early sixties — about comic books causing all sorts of terrible problems with your dear little children. Their minds would be rotted out or they were going to be criminals or something. Anyway, my mother had decided that comic books were not really good things for me to be reading. Then I discovered *Mad Magazine*. The good thing was that she didn't open it and go through it, because I don't think I would have been allowed to keep it. *Mad* has always been raunchy.


HUGO AND NEBULA AWARD WINNER
OCTAVIA E. BUTLER
DAWN
BOOK ONE OF THE XENOGENESIS SERIES
FRIGHTENING, FUN, AND EERILY BEAUTIFUL.
—Washington Post Book World

Where did you submit first?

It was either *Amazing* or *Fantastic* because those were the magazines I could get most consistently. I also felt as though I knew the editor, which was silly because I never met her. She went on to become editor of *Bride Magazine*, which I felt to be quite a comedown.

That's quite a move.

I have no idea whatever became of her. I never met her, and I never got a letter from her, but I did get some rejection slips. You know — the printed kind.

When did you start getting rejection slips that had a comment or two scribbled on the bottom?

When I was around eighteen, I got one. In block caps on the bottom, someone had written, "Almost," which I felt was a real cruelty. What can you do with that? I figured if they were serious, they would have signed it.

Much later, I did get a couple of letters. One from John Campbell said, "Like your writing, like to see more of it, sorry can't use this." Not, obviously, in those words, but you get the idea. I got another one from Terry Carr about the same story, and his comment was, "There doesn't seem to be anything different about this." And he was right — I had tried to write the generic *Analog* story. It was what John Campbell seemed to want, as far as the political stance and everything. I always thought it would be fun to have met him after selling him a story because he had a reputation. But he died before I met him, and I never did sell him anything.

What impact did growing up Baptist have on your writing?

On my writing. Hmmmm. Well, it gave me a subject, of course. It gave me a particular slant toward religion. It wasn't so much about growing up Baptist, but rebelling against it. It was really obvious in **SURVIVOR**, which I wrote when I was nineteen. It's not a good book even as it is, and the version I wrote when I was nineteen was really horrible. The published version is different, though it's still

Cover artwork by John Jude Palencar

Cover artwork by John Jude Palencar

not very good.

I've heard you don't want ***SURVIVOR*** *reprinted.*

Yeah. It's not a good book.

One of the things I just told the class was not to worry about things like talent and inspiration and luck because the real ability that you need in writing is the ability to persist, to learn from your mistakes and keep working, even though you're being rejected all over the place.

You brought that up in your essay "Furor Scribendi". I showed it to one of the creative writing teachers at the high school where I teach.

I longed for a creative writing class when I was in high school and in junior high, but there weren't any. When I got to college, there were three: Creative Writing, Short Story Writing, and Writing for Publication, all taught by an elderly couple who didn't quite know what to make of me and my science fiction and grim fantasy. The old lady was the one who delivered the famous quote, "Can't you write anything normal?"

But I'm still very much in favor of classes and workshops. I told some of the students this morning that writers' classes and workshops are good because they give you a kind of rented audience. They interpret your work back to you, and you can see if you're communicating what you think you are. It's very easy for new writers to make a mistake in that area and just assume that because they know the story so well, the reader knows what they're trying to say.

What people have influenced your work?

Well, my relatives — my mother and grandmother — and their persistence in lives that I thought were horrible. It took me a long time to understand what religion meant to them. It was all they had sometimes. I mean, there were times when we almost starved. There were times when things happened to them that would probably make a lesser person commit suicide. They had their religion, and it helped a lot.

Kids are contemptuous because they don't understand very much, and I spent some time being very contemptuous, until I began to understand what religion meant to them. Once I got to that point, I began to think about religion in a different way and wound up writing **PARABLE OF THE SOWER**, in which the main character's father is a Baptist minister.

My grandfather, incidentally, was a Baptist minister, but I never met him. My father ran away from home. As a matter of fact, he ran away from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He ran all the way to California because my grandfather wanted him to work in the steel mills, and he didn't want to. After he married my mother, they tried over and over to have a kid and they finally had me. Then my father died. So I didn't really know him, either. I have some memories that are probably combinations of shadowy memories and of my mother telling me things.

I think everything that happens to you, whether you expect to use it or not, feeds into your writing. It changes who you are a little bit, and how you look at the world.

That was the main theme in ***PARABLE OF THE SOWER*** *— that God is change, and you can't fight it.*

You can't fight it, no, but you can shape it. It's a hopeful novel.

Is there going to be a sequel to ***PARABLE OF THE SOWER****?*

Yes. **PARABLE OF THE TALENTS** is what I'm working on right now.

What is your daily writing schedule like?

I used to get up between three and four and write until around 7:30, and then I'd go and walk. But it's been so warm in southern California lately, and walking when it's so hot is thoroughly unpleasant, so I changed my schedule. Now I get up around four and as soon as it's light, I'll go walk. The sun does not have to be up — it just has to be light enough so that I don't have to worry about the friendly neighborhood mugger. I get up and I walk, and by the time I get back, it's around six, and I do my writing until around ten. Then I take a nap, and when I get up, it's like another day. It's another period for either writing or whatever else I have to do. I can go to the library, or I can go downtown and take care of business. There's always something to be done. And since my mother died late last year, I have to go by and see to her house.

That must be difficult.

It's strange, but actually it's been a good thing. It's been a long good-bye, to quote another writer, instead of a short one. Normally somebody dies and they're gone, but my mother was eighty-two when she died, and I knew her all my life. You can't say good-bye to a person you've known for so long so quickly, so I've had to go through all of her things and get rid of things like her clothes. I've found little notes that she made from different times in her life. I found one she made just after I was born. She'd been trying to have a baby for a long time. She lost four, and finally she had one. It made her very happy. This note was from a mother I didn't know, and reading that was nice. There were other things — pictures I had forgotten completely. She kept everything. It's actually been nice, if I can use that word in connection with this kind of situation. It's not that I would have wanted to do it; it's just that the way it's gone has been better than any other way I could imagine.

She died relatively quickly of a stroke, and I'm glad of that for her sake. She lived between two and three weeks, though, and even that was too long because it was long enough for us to take her out of the hospital. My aunt, who is a registered nurse, was preparing a room in her house for my mother, and she was going to teach me how to take care of her because I didn't have a place ready for her yet — I didn't even have a second bed in my house. Gradually I was going to shift her things to my house so that I could look after her, but meanwhile she had to go into a nursing home, which she never wanted. She wasn't aware, we hope, because it would have frightened her. She would have been afraid of being abandoned there.

My aunts and I went to the hospital and then the nursing home every day to make sure everything was okay. She couldn't speak — she lost her speech between leaving for the hospital and arriving there. During her second day at the hopsital, she saw us come in, and she immediately began to cry. We wanted to reassure her that she wasn't going to have to stay there, that it was going be...well, not okay, but — that we were there. She died about two weeks after that.

I think the way it worked out was good. She wasn't a young woman. She had a long, full life. I remember her telling me with a certain amount of pride that she was the oldest person in the family.

When you're writing, do you outline first or plunge right in?

Neither. I don't outline unless I have to. I used to have to outline to get money, and then I'd wind up writing another novel. My editor didn't seem to mind. Not that it would be a bad novel — it's just that outlining gave me the feeling that I'd already written that story. It took all the spontaneity out of it. When I don't have to outline, I do my one-sentence summary, which is something I had the students doing this morning. You should always be able to summarize your story in one good, strong active sentence. I'll use an example from my own writing: "Kindred is the story of a black woman who goes back in time to the antebellum South and has to struggle to survive slavery." It tells you who the character is, it tells you what her struggle was, and it tells you in fact that she does survive.

So you start there.

Yeah. That way I don't have to feel like I've killed the story for myself. But I still need to know my characters and I need to know what end I'm working toward. I told the students this morning that if you can outline, you should — it helps you to know step by step if you're going to get where you're going and how you'll get there. But if you can't outline, you should at least have this one sentence.

About how long does it take you to finish a book?

A lifetime. No, really — it takes about a year to write a book once I've got going on writing it, but it can take a lot longer than that to get the book to the point of being writable. For instance, I got the idea for the book **KINDRED** in college, but I didn't know how to write it. I got the idea for **PATTERNMASTER** when I was twelve. I was writing about the characters, but I didn't really know how to write a novel. So I just kept endlessly writing episodes about the characters. When I was fifteen, I wanted to know more about where these people came from, and I came up with the idea for **MIND OF MY MIND**. As I mentioned before, I wrote **SURVIVOR** kind of in religious rebellion when I was nineteen.

I think a lot of writers do this. By the time they're finally published, they have a lot of ideas, even if they don't have a closet full of novels.

[looking at computer screen] *Yeek!*

Did your computer do something terrible?

Oh. No, it's fine. A small glitch.

I just got onto the computer this year. I complain to it that my typewriter never eats my material or in the middle of a sentence suddenly throws half a page down to the next page. My typewriter never changes fonts in the middle of a page for no reason.

I wound up with this weird font once. I didn't ask for it. I look up and the name is up there, and I'm thinking, "Wait a minute." I can understand it going back to 10-point type because that's the standard, but why would it come up with this weird font that I've never used before? It was something like fourteen-point type and really seriously ugly.

Did you go willingly into the computer age, or did you get dragged in, kicking and screaming?

Kicking and screaming. I like my typewriter. But they've stopped making a lot of the stuff that I was using. The last store I knew of that sold typewriter ribbons shut down. I'm sure there are others, but I have to find them. The last thing I bought from them was four typewriter ribbons, and then they shut down.

I know a lot of typewriter repair places have gone under.

Yeah. My typewriter repairman died, and my editor was saying, "I'll buy you a computer. Please!"

Your prose is often described as "spare" or "lean". Orson Scott Card also uses you as an example of how to do exposition properly in his book ***HOW TO WRITE SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY****.*

Oh? I heard he used one of my books as an example on creating characters, but I didn't know he'd used me as a way of writing exposition.

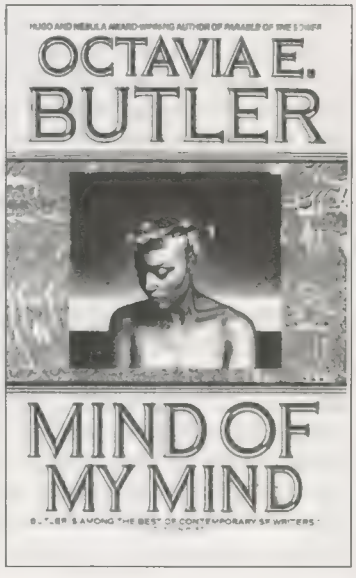
He used the opening paragraph of ***WILD SEED*** *as an example. Is your prose naturally like that, or do you have to work at it?*

Oh, come **on**! [general laughter] To tell the truth, I have to make a conscious effort to keep the spare prose from becoming sparse. Some people write fat and they have to pare it down. I write very, very lean, sometimes too lean. For one thing, I'm not a visual writer. I don't tend to see things — I hear them. And that means if I'm not careful, my characters will be acting or having conversations in a vacuum. When I was about twelve years old and I'd been writing for a couple of years, I suddenly realized I didn't know what my characters looked like. I didn't have a clue! They were just these voices. So I began to give them faces. I found I didn't like them very much when they became more substantial, which was weird, but it was something I had to get used to.

Marion Zimmer Bradley has said that her writing tends to sprawl if she's not careful, but you run in the other direction.

Yeah. I have to go back in and fill in the gaps. Different people. It's really interesting the different ways people write. That's why when young writers want to know the "secret", I'll generally say there isn't any. You have to find your own secrets.

I was telling the students this morning my particular trick for writing beginnings, for instance. I go to my bookcase and pull down books that I've read more than once and really enjoyed and I copy what they did. I copy the first paragraph from at least half a dozen books. I want that many because I want books that begin in many different ways. Once I've done that, I sit there and figure out what each beginning does and how it does it. Some begin with dialogue that involves you immediately in a conversation of some kind. Some authors began with action. One brave person began with description. And some begin with an unusual happening or with something inexplicable, something impossible. That's how I got the idea for the beginning of **MIND OF MY MIND**. I begin with Doro going to visit his widow. I figure people have to keep reading to find out how he could be visiting his own widow.



Cover artwork by John Jude Palencar

Several of your books are taught in African-American literature courses, women's lit courses, and science fiction and fantasy lit courses. What's your reaction to all that schol-

arly attention?

One thing I worry about is that students who are forced to read my work might feel about it as I felt toward some of the people I was forced to read. But apparently that's not happening very much. I haven't heard of it happening at all, though I wouldn't be surprised. There are bound to be some students out there who resent me. [laughs]

*Why did you write the Patternist books backward? **PATTERNMASTER** takes place last, but your wrote it first, and **WILD SEED**, which takes place first, was written last.*

I wrote it that way because that was the way it occurred to me. I had this idea of the Patternists in the distant future and their particular society and their enemies and all that. After a while, I wanted to know more about how they came to be who they were, so I had to invent a past for them. When I created Emma Daniels, who is Anyanwu, I really wanted to do a past for her, but I was a little afraid to. Once I had done that, I had also wanted to do a past for Doro, take him back to his origins, but I've never done that. Norman Mailer came out with a book about a transmigrating Egyptian, and I just figured I didn't really want to follow that.

Doro was me giving myself a chance to play God in a whole new way. Think of it — here is this character who cannot die. I mean, even the vampires in vampire stories can die. In fact, they work very hard at not dying. Doro could not die and had no choice but to kill, and the people that he most enjoyed being with were the ones he had to regard as food.

*I want to get a science fiction and fantasy course started at the high school where I teach, and I want to use **WILD SEED** in the class.*

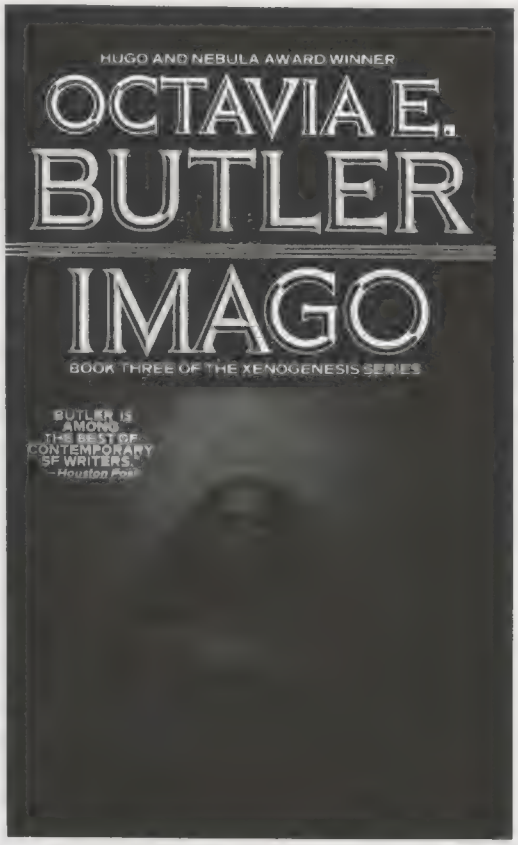
One of the things I'm sure you'll end up saying to your students at some point, if you already haven't, is that what you bring to a story is at least as important as what the author brought to it, and interpretation is inevitable.

*You also did a lot of research into Ibo mythology for **WILD SEED**.*

Ibo life, really. Oddly enough, I've done more since, just looking around Yoruban mythology just because I do want to write about Yoruban mythology. I want to make use of it. Everyone makes use of Greek mythology, so I've been fooling around with Yoruban. There's a good reason why my character in Parable of the Sower is named Lauren Oya Olamina. Oya is a rather tempestuous goddess.

*I wanted to ask you about the original covers for some of your books, **MIND OF MY MIND**, for instance.*

Oh my goodness — you have the green woman cover! The story behind the green woman cover is the only one I actually know. According to someone who may or may not have known what he was talking about, the artist read the book and painted a cover with a black woman on it and was told, "No, no. Won't sell." The artist did another cover with a white woman, but he looked at it and said, "This isn't exactly what the author had in mind." So he went with a green woman.


HUGO AND NEBULA AWARD WINNER
OCTAVIA E. BUTLER
IMAGO
BOOK THREE OF THE XENOGENESIS SERIES
BUTLER IS AMONG THE BEST OF CONTEMPORARY SF WRITERS.
–Houston Post

*And then there are the early printings of **PATTERNMASTER**, **SURVIVOR**, and **WILD SEED** —*

[laughing] Oh no! You have all three of those covers.

Yep. Used book store.

Those books did a little better around the time of **WILD SEED** because **KINDRED** had been published, though the publisher still sold **WILD SEED** for pennies — something like $4,000. I found out about it at a convention in Boston and wandered off in tears and swore that wouldn't happen to me again. I phoned Harlan and asked what I should do so that this never happened again. I've forgotten exactly what he told me. He gave me some advice, generally the idea that I was never going to get anywhere with Doubleday because that was where I was then. They were just going to keep doing that to me — not because they're evil or wicked, but over here you've got the science fiction department, and over here you have the rights department, and over here you have something else. They were so scattered, the right hand didn't know what the left was doing. They didn't know what they were doing with my material, and they weren't worried about it, either.

You obviously weren't happy.

No. And this [gesturing at the paperback] wasn't the original Doubleday cover. That had a totally meaningless graphic on it, and it's a color that's sort of what I think of as dog-vomit green.

*What was the genesis of the Oankali in **XENOGENESIS**? Where did you come up with them?*

Their genesis in my mind is probably the mitochondria. I liked the idea that one entity could so bond with another that they would no longer be thought of two entities. I remember asking my biology teacher back in college, "How do we know this hasn't happened before in others of our own cells or in other cells?" and he said, "Oh, if it happened, we'd know," which I thought was silly. But he was my teacher, so I didn't say anything.

Another thing — there was a nature documentary in which they were talking about algae, and how algae responds when one form of algae growing around a rock on the seashore meets another form of algae. Does it say, "Excuse me," and start growing around another part of the rock? No. One poisons the other.

There was also a Jane Goodall special in which chimpanzees shunned one of their fellow chimps because it had polio and had to walk upright. It was so unusual and strange to them that they just simply shunned him, and no one would come near him except his relatives. What I was looking at was our, shall we call it, natural competitiveness and xenophobia, so I thought, what kind of people would xenophilic people be?

I couldn't find that word in any dictionary back then,

Cover artwork by John Jude Palencar

incidentally, though it seemed a natural word formation. I finally found it in the **OED**, but not in any regular American dictionary.

No one was using it.

Apparently not. [laughs] There's probably a reason for that. I thought, what kind of people would xenophiles be? And I wound up creating these natural genetic engineers whose basic essence is this tiny little organelle in their cells that collectively takes advantage of any environment. They're gene traders. They say, "Here's what's the matter. We're going to fix it."

Photo by Miriam Berkley

A common theme in your writing is people dealing with lack of or limited choices. I can only think of one or two pieces where that doesn't show up in some form or other. Is this on purpose?

Well, we don't always have choices. It certainly is a point of conflict. And all too often even when we do have choices, they're not necessarily the ones we want. You know — devil or the deep blue sea choices.

*There are a lot of those in **XENOGENESIS** and the Patternist books.*

Yes. And in **PARABLE OF THE TALENTS**. My character is beginning to grow the business that she and her community have begun. Her people don't want to poke their heads up because they're afraid their heads will be knocked off. They have good reason to be concerned because it's a very bad time. It's time when America is getting...not fascist, when you think about what that really means. But in all the chaos, people are desperate for some sort of order, and they're beginning to put some very bad people in power. Lauren can go vote against them, but what's that going to do? The people in her community say, "We don't want to get political," and she says, "To be human is to be political." So it's another of those situations where your choices are not necessarily fun choices, but there they are.

What do you like to read?

I'm in a non-fiction phase. Most recently I read the two books, **THE MAKING OF THE ATOMIC BOMB** and then **RED SUN: THE MAKING OF THE ATOMIC BOMB**.

One of my weaknesses is between-the-wars English mysteries. I've never really liked modern English mysteries. They're tired and nasty, sort of like our own mysteries. But the between-the-wars mysteries kind of look at a world that maybe never was there, but is certainly not there now.

Rumor has it you're shy.

I am, really. But I realized that I was going to have be a little bit more outgoing if I was going to make any success at all. So I worked on it, and I went to a Dale Carnegie class and I made a fool of myself a lot. After a while, I didn't die from it. My shyness still comes up sometimes. When I got in last night, I didn't come right to this apartment; I went to the building across the way there and was taken into the class. The students were being told what to expect, and I felt very shy. But I know that about myself now, and it no longer causes me horrible pain that I feel that way. I'm better able to deal with it.

What is your primary piece of advice to people trying to get published?

It's that one word: **persist**.

Thank you, Octavia Butler.

❄

OCTAVIA BUTLER BIBLIOGRAPHY

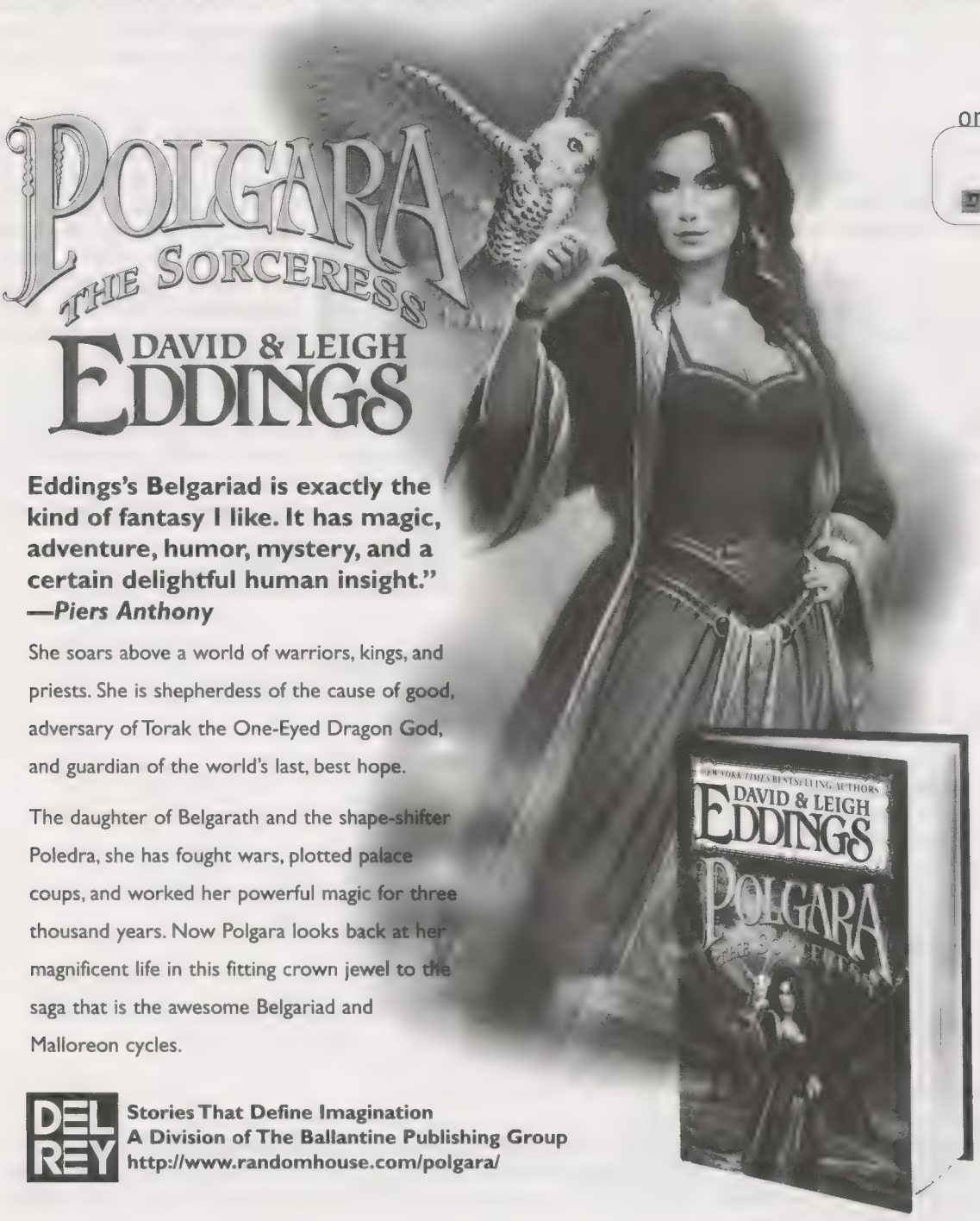
Kindred (1979)
Parable of the Sower (1994): Nebula nominee

Xenogenesis Trilogy
Dawn (1987)
Adulthood Rites (1988)
Imago (1989)

Patternist Novels (in order of events)
Wild Seed (1980)
Mind of My Mind (1977)
Clay's Ark (1984)
Survivor (1978)
Patternmaster (1976)

Collected Short Works
Bloodchild and Other Stories (1995)
Includes Preface, "Bloodchild" (1984, Nebula and Hugo winner); "The Evening and the Morning and the Night" (1987); "Near of Kin" (1979); "Speech Sounds" (1983, Hugo winner); "Crossover" (1971); and two essays: "Positive Obsession" (1989 as "Birth of a Writer") and "Furor Scribendi" (1993). Afterwords for each story by the author.

TWO OF FANTASY'S MOST POPULAR MASTERS CONJURE ONE OF MAGIC'S MOST POWERFUL MISTRESSES FOR A MOST PHENOMENAL SERIES FINALE!

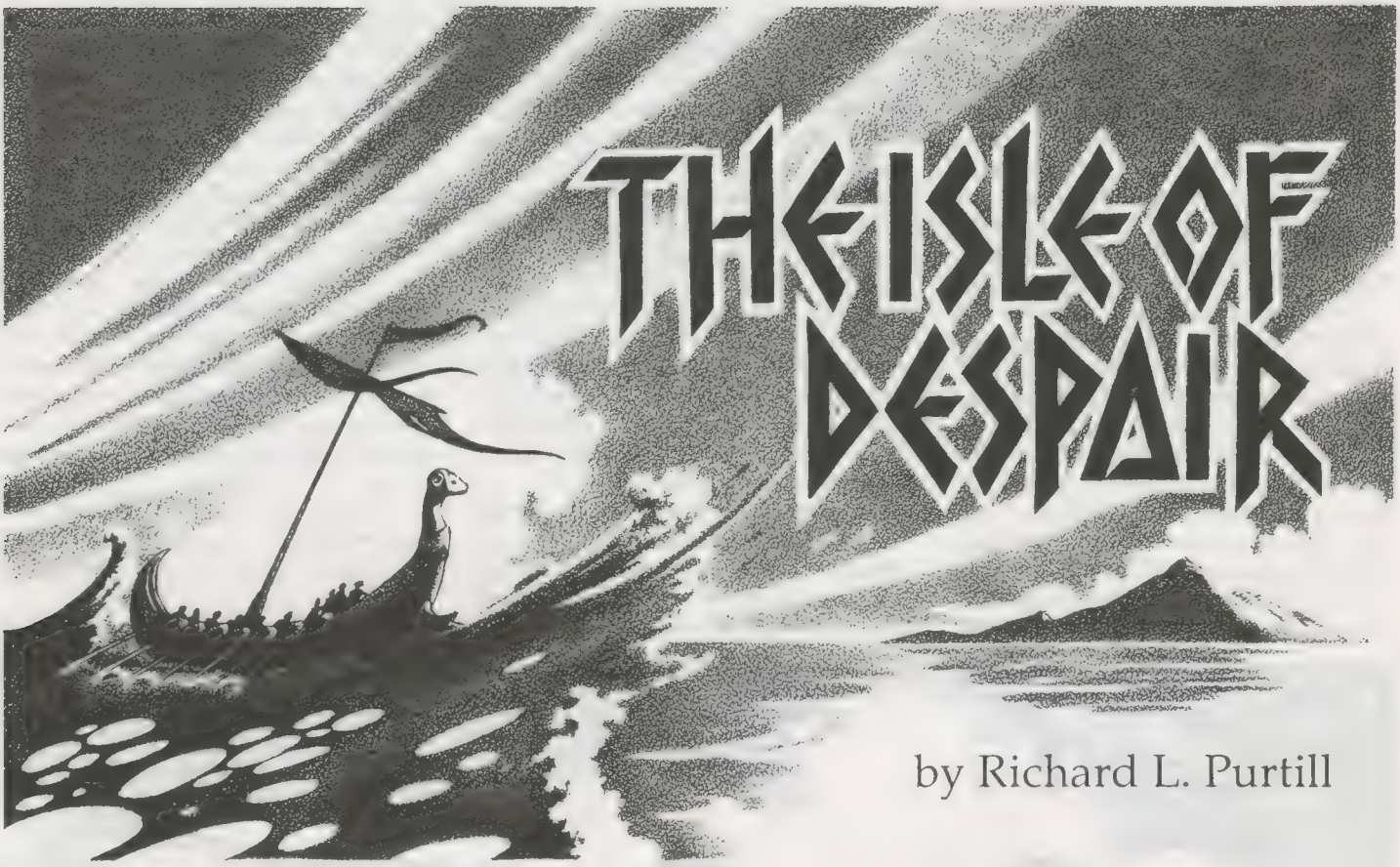


Eddings's Belgariad is exactly the kind of fantasy I like. It has magic, adventure, humor, mystery, and a certain delightful human insight."
—Piers Anthony

She soars above a world of warriors, kings, and priests. She is shepherdess of the cause of good, adversary of Torak the One-Eyed Dragon God, and guardian of the world's last, best hope.

The daughter of Belgarath and the shape-shifter Poledra, she has fought wars, plotted palace coups, and worked her powerful magic for three thousand years. Now Polgara looks back at her magnificent life in this fitting crown jewel to the saga that is the awesome Belgariad and Malloreon cycles.

DEL REY
Stories That Define Imagination
A Division of The Ballantine Publishing Group
http://www.randomhouse.com/polgara/



by Richard L. Purtill

When we were at sea again, I saw that the breeze which had blown us up to the land of the Thracians had given us a false picture of how easy it would be to get home. There was a steady north wind which kept getting stronger and stronger until it was a full gale, and such sails as we had not taken down already were torn to shreds on the mast. Presently we had to unstep the masts because even without sails, they caused a problem: vibrating on the wind, pulling out their stays, even without sails providing enough surface for the wind to catch on. The presence of the masts stored in the boat was just one more burden to put up with: there is no place to store a mast that is not in the way. We tried sea anchors and the sea twisted them away: because of the gale, we could not rig ropes around the boat to hold the planks together and the planks began losing their caulking and leaking. Our bailing fell further and further behind, so that the boats began sinking in the water, and we were all wet, cold and miserable. Finally we managed to use a lull in the storm to get ashore on some nameless island. There the weather seemed to moderate a little, and we refitted our ships as far as we could, hoping that we had seen the worst of the storm.

The third day after we had landed, there was a beautiful morning and we set sail with high hopes of getting back to our own lands quickly. But it was a false promise: as soon as we were well out to sea, the winds picked up and the gale was even worse than before. All we could do was run before it with no hope of turning westward and then north again to reach our own island. This was no ordinary storm: there was Olympian meddling behind it. Like most sailors, I both love and hate the sea; love it when I can defeat it, hate it when it defeats me. I told myself that staying alive in this gale, keeping our ships unsunk and together, was a sort of victory, not only over the sea but against whichever gods were persecuting us. Against the sea and the Olympians there is no hope of ultimate victory: at most you can defy them and tell them to do their worst.

Finally, the wind stopped playing with us and died down: ahead of us was an island with the loom of the mainland behind it. We could be anywhere on the African coast. Straight south from Troy and Ismarus would bring us to Egypt, but I think that the wind must have veered to the east, and we had been blown westward. We had been at sea for nine days after our stop at the nameless island, and at the rate we were going, we would easily have made Egypt in not much more than half that time. I suspected that we were in the empty and uncivilized part of Africa west of Egypt and faced a long voyage back, especially if we had to fight the winds.

We sailed into a harbor on the island, a seemingly pleasant place with a wide sandy beach, but there was a curiously dispiriting air about it, something that lowered rather than lifted your spirits. We grounded our ships on the beach and pulled them up high enough to avoid the tides; then we walked from the shore to the grassy uplands beyond the sand. There was a stream, and we drank our fill and then cast ourselves down in the grass. At first there was only exhaustion: we slept and slept until we could sleep no more. But even after we had had our fill of sleep, we seemed to have no energy. There were things that needed to be done with the ships if we were to leave this place, but they all seemed too much trouble. We wandered vaguely about, hardly looking at each other, and presently we spread out on the uplands, so that we

Artwork by George Barr

did not have to make contact: somehow it seemed less trouble to be on our own, to not have to acknowledge each other. At first there was only a mood of laziness, as one might have on a long summer afternoon at home, but presently the mood changed. Laziness is a pleasant emotion for a while, but now I began to feel a dull irritation at anything which made any demands on me.

Wandering aimlessly among the small hills which backed the grassy upland, I saw a man whom I did not recognize — surely not from any of our ships. A dull curiosity made me say, "Who are you? Do you live on this island?" He gazed at me and at first did not reply. Then he said listlessly, "I do now. Our ships came here — long ago. What does it matter?"

I looked at him, first incuriously, then with a rising sense of panic. He was filthy, with the ingrained dirt of many days without washing. His clothing was a few old rags hung together on his body with many gaps and torn places. His hair was long and tangled. How many days would it take for me to reach this stage if everything was too much trouble, if there was no point in anything? He was gaunt, but not too starved-looking — I knew from my own experience of the past few days that the pangs of hunger could arouse enough energy to look for food, but as soon as you found enough, either from supplies we had brought or from the fruits and berries growing on the island, you relapsed into apathy.

I tried to make this panic work for me, to keep me doing at least something. "Where are your ships?" I asked. He gave a vague wave of his hand and I followed the direction of his wave. Across a little range of hills was another beach, a little less sheltered than the one where we had landed. Pulled up on it were three ships, or rather three wrecks, for nothing had been done to save them from wind or weather and they were gradually being reduced to their component elements. Caulking had dried and fallen out from between the planks, windborne sand had scoured paint off the decorated prows, and cracks were beginning in the wood. Scattered in the bottom of the boat were weapons and armor, and even a few bits of treasure, flung aside as the crew of the ship had hunted for something to eat.

I looked at the boats and imagined my own boats reduced to this state, all hope of making our way back home lost.

Then a fit of despondency seized me.

Artwork by George Barr

My wife, Penelope, my son, Telemachus, my home, my kingship, my reputation — what did any of it matter? Nothing was worth any effort. It was even too much trouble to wander about, to search for food. I walked down shore to the water, kicked off my sandals and started swimming outward. When I had swum far enough out, the sea would take me and I would never have to make any effort again.

I am a strong swimmer, and I was a long way off shore when my mind began to come back to me. What had I been thinking? Of course I wanted to get home, of course I could not abandon my men and my ships here. I stopped swimming and looked back at the island. From this far away, it looked peaceful and serene. But it was not — it was a deadly trap. Something about the island, perhaps the fruits and berries we had eaten, perhaps some mental influence, robbed anyone who landed here of any ambition, except to drift along and eat when the pangs of hunger got too painful. The sooner I could get my ships away from here the better, but how was I to do it? If I could keep clear of the influence, I might be able to force the men back to their benches, but how could I make them row away from the island?

I turned and swam back toward the island, but as I got closer to it, I felt the pall of despondency descend on me. Knowing it was coming from outside me enabled me to fight it off, but how long would I be able to keep it from seizing me again once I was on shore?

Just then I saw the slight change in the water ahead that warned me that jellyfish were floating in the water ahead of me. As a boy I had been stung by jellyfish and I remembered the pain. I started to avoid them; then a mad thought struck me. Pain could temporarily lift the depression; the pangs of hunger or thirst gave you a motive to do something. Before I could think again, I aimed straight at the school of jellyfish and swam through it. I was stung of course, on my arms and legs and hands and face, everywhere except where the tunic I had worn into the water protected me. I swam frantically to the shore, hoping that the poison in my body was not enough to kill me.

It was not, but it was enough to make me wish to die. There was a painful itch all over the exposed parts of my body: I was conscious of nothing except rage. As I passed the wrecks, I seized a sword from one of the hulks and strode up away from the shore. Now that I was aware of the depression as coming from outside of myself, I could sense that it had a focus: a low mountain which could be seen over the foothills behind the grassy uplands. I dashed up that mountain as if I were attacking the hill of Troy, conscious of nothing but rage and the itching of my body.

At the top of the mountain there was a sort of hollow, hidden from below: I burst into it and looked around wildly. On a sort of low stool at the back of the hollow was a figure bent over and holding its face in its hands. I could hear its thoughts as if it were speaking them aloud. "What's the use ... nothing matters ... nothing is worth doing ...."

I ran up to the figure and, seeing that it was a woman, instead of attacking it with the edge of my sword, I began beating it on the back and bottom with the flat of my sword. "Stop that!" I yelled, my rage and pain making it hard for me to be coherent. "Stop repeating that to yourself! Do you know what you're doing to my men? Stop that, you fool, or I'll kill you!"

The figure lifted its face from its hands and looked at me in dull surprise. "You can't," it said aloud. "They said I'd be immortal."

I lifted my sword. "They did, did they? Did they say you'd remain unhurt? How about if I wound you terribly; will you still live on in agony forever?"

The woman gazed at me. "They didn't say — only that I'd never die ... But why are you threatening me? I haven't done anything ... it's they that have stolen my son from me ... my son, my only son ... It's not fair ...."

My mind was working now, free of that constant refrain of *nothing matters, nothing is worth doing*. Even the pain of the jellyfish stings was forgotten as I faced this new problem. It was not at all clear that I could really threaten this woman; perhaps she would be invulnerable to attack, or would heal as soon as I wounded her. But the important thing was that she *thought* that I could threaten her: fear of me had taken the place, for the moment, of her endless litany.

"What isn't fair? I shouted at her. "I've just come from Troy: many mothers lost their sons to death there, both on our side and the other. I haven't seen my wife or my son for almost ten years, and they don't sit lamenting me; they go about their lives! Is your son dead? — so are many sons of other mothers."

"No," she said. "He's immortal too, but they've taken him away from me, to a place I can't come to ...."

I hesitated, then said slowly, "By 'them' you must mean the Olympian gods — only they could make you immortal and your son immortal too. I've heard stories that sometimes they take one of us mortals and take us to Olympus; I don't know why. If your son is worth mourning, perhaps he'll make some kind of contact with you, if possible. If he is on Olympus, he is deathless and happy, like the Gods. You've been given immortal life in this world — how can you waste it sitting here mourning? If your son does try to make contact with you, perhaps your own despair stands in the way. Why can't you be happy for your son's good fortune and your own?"

She looked at me with a faint spark of interest. I don't flatter myself that my words had changed her mind, but perhaps they were a kind of catalyst: she may have been ready to come to terms with her grief and only needed some encouragement.

I tried one more suggestion. "Lady," I said, "whether it is some aspect of this place or something about yourself, your mourning has somehow covered this whole island. All the men who land here are caught up in your despair. None of them has any ambition but to drift from day to day. That means that their wives and mothers and sisters will never see them again, for they will never leave this place. You are condemning other women to the same fate you are lamenting: their sons are alive but they will never see them again."

This time I had really caught her interest, and she looked at me and nodded slowly. "Yes," she said, "you are right, stranger. I have been thinking only of myself, and perhaps not enough of my son, and not at all of any effect I may have had on others. You may be right about this place too: we are taught in the women's mysteries that this place has something like an echo, only for thoughts and not words. That's why I came here, to shut out everything else, and hear only my own despair. But you're right; that is not worthy of me, and it has done harm to others. I will go now and travel to a shrine of the Mother:

perhaps she will hear my prayers to let me know how my son is, and if not, praying is better than despair, even if our prayers are not heard. Farewell, stranger."

She rose and walked slowly away, passing into a cleft in the rocks that perhaps marked another way out of this place. Not one I wanted to take: I had had enough of that woman and this place. I turned to go out the way I had come in and then a thought struck me. If this place had some sort of mental echo, perhaps I could use it for my own purposes. Trying to bring my pain and rage under control, I thought of home and my longing to get there, thought of taking every means to do it, thought of repairing the ships and getting to sea to find my way home. After a long while I came to myself and asked myself how long I had been thinking these thoughts here, and could not give an answer. I lunged for the way I had come in and ran as fast as I could down the way I had come in. I could have stayed there, thinking these thoughts forever, sending anyone who caught my thoughts back to their own homes, while I was trapped there as long as I lived. I wondered how long the woman had been there, thinking her thoughts of despair.

I paused on the way down the hill to pick some plants which I know helped take the sting away from nettles and rubbed them over the parts of my body which had been stung by the jellyfish. Whether because they were effective against one kind of sting as they were against the other, or because the jellyfish stings were fading, it reduced my agony of body to a tolerable level: when I thought of how the pain had enabled me to resist the despairing thoughts of the woman, it was a pain I was glad to bear.

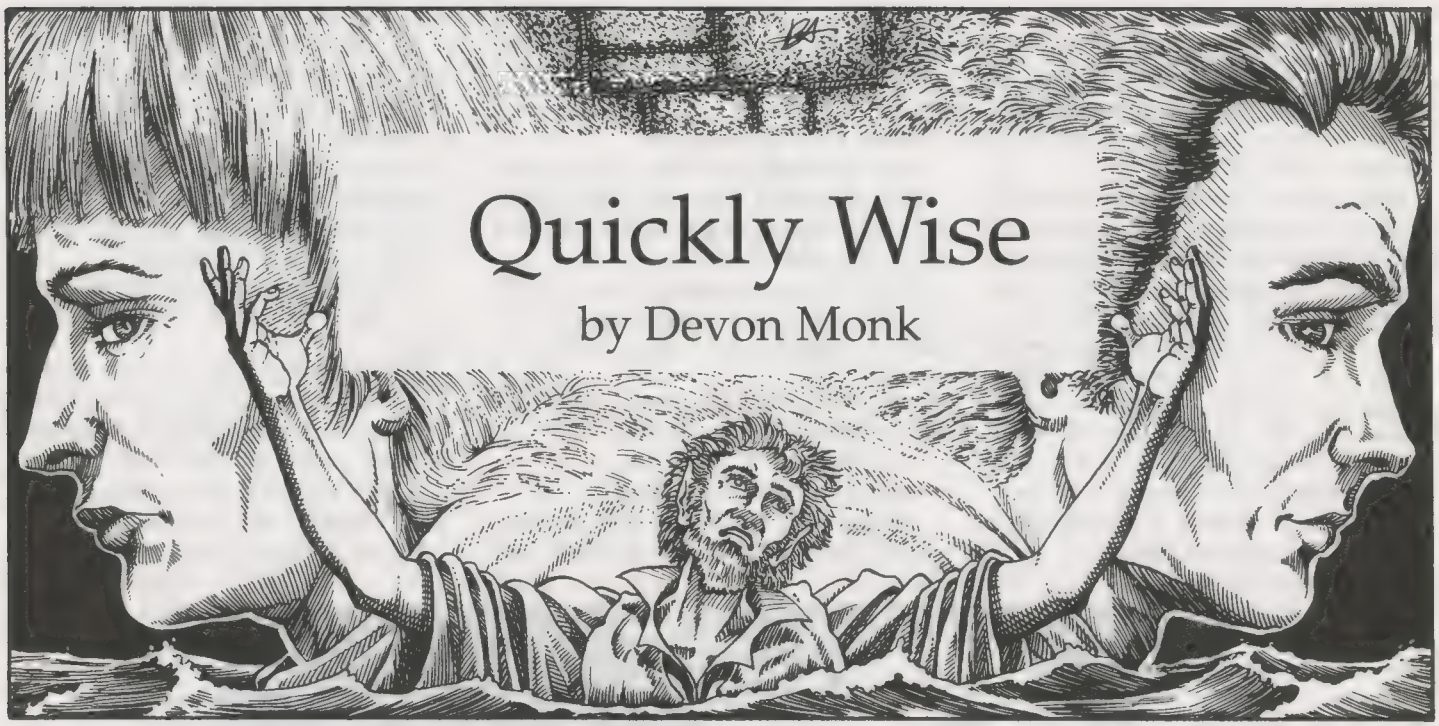
When I got back to our ships, my men were frantically working on them, everyone as eager as the others to launch our ships and get home. It was all I could do to restrain them until our ships were really ready to sail. When we launched our ships, none of us looked back at the island. It had nightmare memories for all of us, memories of giving up, memories of despair and despondency. For me, it taught one lesson — it is better to *want* something, even foolishly and vainly, than to give up hope. Achilles, for example, had wanted immortal fame, even at the cost of his own life. It seemed a foolish ambition to me — if we know nothing after death, what use is fame, and if we know, as I hope, better things than in this life, fame here will seem unimportant to us. But it had given his life a point: Achilles was often unhappy, but never bored. He had never said to himself, "What's the use of anything, what's the use of trying?" and having been in that state, I could see that almost anything was better than that.

❄

Artwork by George Barr

Richard Purtill was born in Chicago. He studied philosophy at the University of Chicago, earning his Ph.D. in 1965. Since 1962 he has been a professor of philosophy at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington. After a second honeymoon with his wife in Greece, Richard Purtill became fascinated with the country. He has returned many times, writing three fantasy novels for adults based on Greek mythology: **THE GOLDEN GRYPHON FEATHER, THE STOLEN GODDESS, THE MIRROR OF HELEN**; and a young-adult novel, **ENCHANTMENT AT DELPHI**. Purtill has also written a science fiction novel, a mystery, and various short stories of fantasy, science fiction, and mystery.

George Barr lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and has been a professional artist since 1960. He has received a Hugo as Best Fan Artist and has been Artist Guest of Honor at WorldCon.



Quickly Wise

by Devon Monk

Sometimes dead isn't good enough, Meggi thought as she ran from the mob of perfume-drenched women. She ducked into the forest and glanced over her shoulder. Four or five of the scantily clad women had dropped behind, but several were still on her trail.

Meggi swore. If she ever caught that drunken little wish-giving cluricaun again, she'd throw him back in the town well and let him drown.

Oh, he had granted her wish. With her blue eyes, thick black hair and narrow hips, she was no longer an ugly princess. She could go out in daylight without frightening children — could marry a prince and explore the world she longed to see.

But there was a severe drawback to her good looks, something that destroyed her hopes of leaving Dandebury to live the life she had always dreamed of. She was now a man.

The women split into two groups. One headed north to catch the trail to the top of the ridge, the other cut down a wallow, blocking her way to the river.

Meggi slowed. Running wouldn't change anything. Wings would probably help, but she hadn't wished for wings.

She peered through tree limbs and tried to make out the forms of the women in the dim light of dusk. From the sounds of rustling and crashing, it seemed they were making good progress blocking her forward path.

An ugly girl is quickly wise, Meggi thought as she turned. What she needed was the cluricaun and her wish back. She followed the edge of the forest to the filthy side of town.

Trees thinned to reveal a rutted lane that had once been the main road through Dandebury. The town well jutted up from the middle of the lane; broken stones at the well's rim loose and crooked like teeth in a dark gum. A moat of mud surrounded the well's making any visit a dirty one. It was an ugly spot, but quiet. Meggi had never been bothered here, not even in daylight.

Tonight the lane was nearly empty of traffic. As long as some rough didn't try to pick a fight with her, or a lady in distress didn't scream for rescue, she should be able to reach the well unnoticed.

She paused, drew her hood over her face and strode into the lane. She circled the well slowly, starting near its walls and taking a step backward on each circuit. Only a few hours had passed since she fished the cluricaun out of the water. There might still be footprints, tiny footprints that would tell her where her benefactor had gone.

On her third circuit of the well, she noticed a trail of small foot-shaped smudges leading down the street toward a broken-down pub.

Meggi followed the trail. The snores of a drunk in the gutter reached her as did the smell of sour wine and stale urine.

She was so intent on following the footprints that she didn't notice the blind woman huddled against a crumbling wall.

"Copper, Miss?"

Meggi jumped at the question and searched her cloak pocket for a coin. She dropped a copper in the old woman's hand and quickly walked by. By the time she reached the pub, she was shaking. If a blind woman knew she was a woman, would the men in the pub know also? Was she walking like a woman, or breathing like a woman or had the spell worn away?

She looked at her hands and arms, both wider and hairier than hers naturally were. She had no desire to glance down her body for further proof. She was still a man.

Meggi pushed the door open and stepped in. The room was filled with bodies, a small hearth fire casting light over the crowd. No footsteps to follow here. The floor was dirt. Meggi ground her teeth in frustration.

The cluricaun had to be here.

She moved toward the bar, scanning the crowd. If she were a drunken little wish-giver, where would she be?

Not in plain sight where she would be caught and forced to give out wishes all night long. No, she'd want to be somewhere quiet, hidden, yet somewhere she could still get her hands on

Artwork by Barb Armata

a mug of ale.

The cellar!

A tenor in the back of the room began singing a song about clever wives and dumb cows and soon the crowd was roaring out the chorus.

Meggi hoped the pub was too busy singing to notice her slip around the bar. She shouldered through a narrow door and was greeted by cool air and darkness. Wooden stairs lead into a room lined with bottles and ale-casks.

She felt her way down the stairs, dragging fingertips along the damp wood and dirt wall. A trail of magic glowed with pale fire across the cellar floor. Heart pounding in her ears, Meggi strode across the room to a tumble of kegs in the corner.

Magic pooled sunlight-bright around the cluricaun. His two-hand tall frame was sprawled over a bed of empty wine bottles. Drool ran from his stained beard to tattered coat and vest.

She had found him. Now all she had to do was keep a hold of him. Meggi grabbed the cluricaun under the arms and pulled him up.

"I want my wish back," she said.

The little man snorted and blinked, bleary eyes crossing. "Wha?"

"I. Want. My. Wish. Back," Meggi said, shaking him with each word.

That seemed to wake him. "What wish? Put me down!" He kicked his legs and batted at her arms with his tiny fists.

"I wished not to be ugly. If you don't let me make a new wish, I'll throw you back in the well where I found you."

"I can't swim!" he said.

"I know."

He scowled up at her. "What's wrong? You wanted beauty, you got it."

"I'm a man!"

"So?"

Meggi tucked the wriggling, screaming creature under her arm, stormed up the stairs and out through the crowded room. A bar maid looked up, wide eyed, but said nothing. She marched down the street.

She grabbed the little man by one ankle and held him at arms' length over the mouth of the well. "Give me back my wish."

The cluricaun swung slowly to and fro. His skin was purple against the moon-lightened sky, his eyes wickedly clear.

"Tell me your wish. I'll give you what you want if you let me go."

"Promise?"

"By my word," he gritted.

Meggi tried to sort her feelings. She didn't want to be an ugly princess, but wasn't going to go through life as a man either. What did she want? Beauty, love? To see places she had never thought she could see? Yes, all that and more. But those things were fairytales, and a fairytale wish would surely get her into more trouble than her first wish had.

Her extended arm began to shake. The cluricaun kicked his one free foot and eyed the deep, dark water below. "Hurry, girl, before you drop me! Wish for something."

She didn't want to be what she had been, and didn't want to stay the way she was. "I wish to be what I truly am."

"Done."

Magic rushed over her skin. The cluricaun dropped from her hand — no, wing. He caught himself by one arm on the rim of the well.

"Ungrateful owl," he yelled up to her. "You could have put me down first."

But she didn't hear him. She was too busy realizing she was not beautiful, desired, or rich, but something immeasurably better. She was free.

Night was as light as day, and the earth spread out below her like a fairytale waiting to be explored. She beat her wings, and climbed higher, hoots of joy echoing across the moon-heavy sky.

❄

Devon Monk lives in Salem, Oregon with her husband and two boys. Her imagination, however, has no fixed address.

She has been a reader and dreamer all of her life and started writing at sixteen. She now writes fantasy, science fiction, outdoor nonfiction, and most anything else that comes to mind while being the wife/mom/coordinator of a four-generation family in one house.

"The house we live in has the reputation of having elastic walls, and the back door is never closed. It is therefore not uncommon to have eighteen people wandering through at any given time," Monk comments.

Barb Armata has illustrated for many publications, most frequently for these pages, and her paintings have been displayed at both World Science Fiction and World Fantasy art shows.

Artwork by Barb Armata

Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine
BACK ISSUE ORDER FORM

SPECIAL OFFERS

___ Back issues available (#2 - 37 minus any sold-out issues), autographed by Marion Zimmer Bradley: $150.00 postpaid.

FEATURED AUTHOR SETS

___ **Jo Clayton Special:** Issues 8, 18, 26, 29, 32
(Four "Arakney" stories, plus one other)
$15.00 postpaid.

___ **Dorothy Heydt Special**: Issues 2, 17, 21, 27, 32, 36
(Seven stories — four Cauldron winners!) If you can find a copy of #12, see also "Back to Basics". Look for Dorothy again in issue #40.
$18.00 postpaid.

___ **Tanya Huff Special**: Issues 21, 28, 29
(Two cover stories and an interview. See also "Be It Ever So Humble" in *The Best of MZBFM #1.*)
$9.00 postpaid.

___ **Phyllis Ann Karr Special**: Issues 3, 5, 22
(Three stories — including two cover stories. See also "The Truth About the Lady of the Lake" in *The Best of MZBFM #1* and "The Robber Girl, the Sea Witch, and the Little Mermaid's Voice" in *The Best of MZBFM #2.*)
$9.00 postpaid.

___ **Cynthia McQuillin Special**: Issues 21, 26, 29
(Mages and Gryphons and Dragons!)
$9.00 postpaid.

___ **eluki bes shahar Special**: Issues 18, 28, 31
(Three stories, including two Cauldron winners!)
$9.00 postpaid.

___**Mercedes Lackey Special:** Issues 23, 37
("Killer Byte", a Diana Tregarde story; and "Grey". She was also featured in issues 9, 10, 12, and 13 — now out of print.) $10.00 postpaid.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State: _____ Zip +4: _ _ _ _ _ - _ _ _ _

Please enclose check or money order in U.S. currency and make payable to **Marion Zimmer Bradley.**

Or: MC/Visa No. _ _ _ _ - _ _ _ _ - _ _ _ _ - _ _ _ _ Exp. ____ / ____

Signature: _____

Send to:
P.O. Box 249
Berkeley, CA 94701

Wallan's Sanity Test

by Carl Bowen

Wallan opened the balcony window and let in the short purple man in the business suit who had been waiting outside. Wallan hadn't been expecting any company, but he had never been in the habit of turning away guests. Not even short, purple ones that showed up unexpectedly in the middle of the night.

"Good evening," the visitor said as he stepped past Wallan into the dining room. He seemed perfectly at ease with himself as he made himself comfortable in a nearby chair. "I assume you've called me here on official business?"

Wallan blinked in confusion. "*I* called *you*? I didn't realize —"

"Oh, no," the man moaned. He was holding a clipboard in one hand and he slammed it down on Wallan's table. "'I didn't realize I'd called anyone!' That's what you're going to say, isn't it? Then it will be, 'Who are you?' then, 'What are you doing here?' or my personal favorite, 'Why are you purple?' It's the same with everyone."

Wallan flinched from the annoyance in the purple dwarf's voice and took a step away. "I'm sorry," he said quietly.

The little man rolled his eyes and put all five of the fingers of his right hand on the point where his nose met his eyebrows. "I mean if you think you're going crazy, why is seeing a little purple man so hard to accept?"

Wallan looked around nervously and said, "I don't know what you mean. This is very confusing."

"Oh, all right, I'll humor you," the purple man sighed. "My name is Inot and I represent the Sanity Guild. We have word that you wish to withdraw your claim. Is that so?"

"Withdraw what claim? What Sanity Guild?"

"Do I have to explain *everything* to you? Are you really this dense? Please tell me you're not this dense."

Wallan could only shrug.

Inot put his fingers back where they had been a moment ago and massaged the bridge of his nose. "Okay, fine. When someone does not wish to retain their sanity claim, someone from my office is called in to give the Sanity Test to determine whether or not sufficient grounds exist for termination of the claim. That's why I'm here. We got word at headquarters that you might want to give up your claim, so I came down to see if you're qualified to do so."

"Give up my sanity claim?" Wallan said quietly. Then his face brightened and he said, "You mean you're going to tell me whether or not I'm crazy."

Inot's face pinched up and he said, "We try to stay away from that term, Mister Rhyes. It's rather dated."

"Well, what term would you prefer?"

"Constituent," the little man said, glancing at Wallan over the top of his clipboard.

Wallan's forehead wrinkled. "'Constituent' doesn't mean crazy. They're totally different words. It wouldn't mean anything if I were to go around saying I'm 'constituent'."

Inot sighed in frustration. "Yes, they are, Mister Rhyes. Totally different." He marked something on his clipboard and said, "And I must say that your pointing that out isn't going to help your case any. Normally, people who want to give up their claims are more willing to accept things that don't make any sense."

Wallan sat down across from the purple dwarf and realized that he had

Artwork by Barb Armata

an excellent point.

"Next question," Inot said. "Do you do any art?"

"Art? What kind of art?"

"Painting, sculpture, poetry, collage, anything? Art's usually a pretty good indicator of mental stability."

"I carve stuff into food," Wallan said helpfully. "I cut shapes into carrots and potatoes and stuff." People had always teased him about it, but Wallan had never given up his odd hobby.

Inot's face brightened. "Well, we might just be onto something here. Can I see something you've carved, please?"

"Well, no. Usually after I carve something into my food I eat it."

Inot rolled his eyes. "Well, that's not really going to help us, is it?"

"Sorry. I guess not."

Inot flipped a page on his clipboard and moved on with the test.

"Do you think you're crazy?"

Wallan almost answered but stopped himself suddenly. "That's a trick question," he realized. "Everybody says that if you think you're crazy then you're probably still not."

Inot looked up from his clipboard. "Just answer yes or no."

Wallan looked around nervously. "What happens if I refuse to answer?"

"Then I mark it down as a yes."

"Don't do that."

"So then it's a no?"

"No, it's a yes! I mean, wait, it's not that either! It's just .... Can't we just skip that one?"

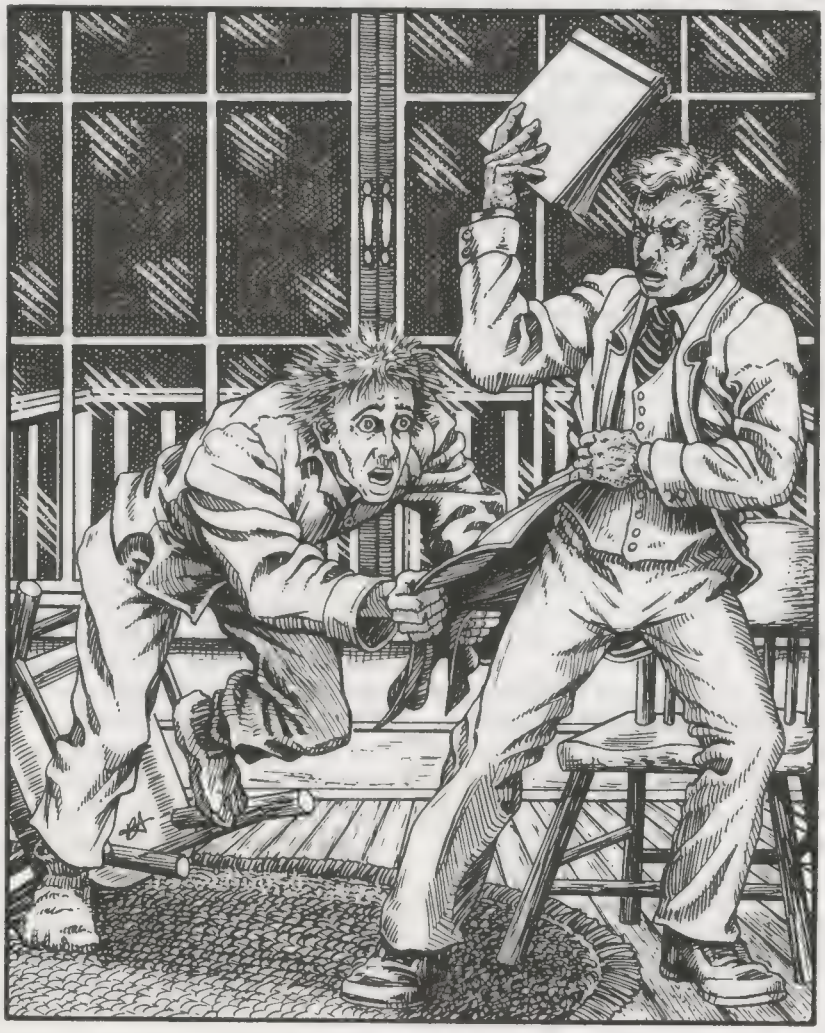
"Hmf!" Inot snorted. He clipped his pencil back onto his clipboard and stood up. "We most certainly can," he said, going back to the window through which he had come in. "It and all the rest."

Wallan stood up. "What? Where are you going?"

"I wanted this test to work out for you, Mister Rhyes, but I can only do so much. I tried to be patient with you, but you won't cooperate with the test. Therefore I'm leaving."

"Wait," Wallan cried. "You can't go. I was counting on going insane. I've got such great plans."

Inot turned around and glared at Wallan. "You had *plans* for what you wanted to do after you went insane?"



"Yeah. I was going to —"

"Oh, don't bother! You can't plan insanity in advance, Mister Rhyes."

"Can't you do something? I absolutely must go insane."

"Aha! That's your problem right there," Inot said pointing accusingly. "I can't make you insane, you have to be there already. Since you most obviously are not, you have done nothing but waste my time."

He turned to leave again, but Wallan lunged across the room and grabbed him by the tail of his purple coat.

"Please!" he cried desperately.

Inot shook himself free and almost rapped Wallan on the head with his clipboard. "Why is this so important to you?" he asked instead.

"Because everything would be so much easier," Wallan said, getting to his knees. "I'd be free. I wouldn't have to do what anybody says. I could do what I want without having to worry about what anybody thinks."

Inot's face saddened and he helped Wallan to his feet. "I'm sorry, Mister Rhyes," he said, "but I just can't help you. You've failed the test and there's nothing more I can do, no matter what plans you've made."

"Well, can I at least take it again?"

"I didn't come here from the department of motor vehicles, Mister Rhyes. You only get to take this test once. You've failed and you're sane. I'm sorry."

Before Wallan could protest again, Inot stepped outside, closed the window, and left.

"Can it be?" Wallan whispered in the now-silent room. "After all my planning and dreaming, can it really be true? Am I really sane?"

As much as he wanted to deny it, Wallan already knew the answer. Try as he might to hide from it, the simple fact was that his plans would never come to light. No sane man could accomplish what he hoped to accomplish, and now he knew that he was undeniably sane.

The purple dwarf from the Sanity Guild had said so.

❄

Carl Bowen recently graduated from the University of Georgia with a bachelor's degree in advertising. He has been writing fiction since his sophomore year of high school, and though "Wallan's Sanity Test" is not his first publication, it is his first sale to a major magazine.

Barb Armata has illustrated for many publications, most frequently for these pages, and her paintings have been displayed at both World Science Fiction and World Fantasy art shows.

Artwork by Barb Armata

The Last Word

I'm proud to say that *MZBFM* had what were clearly The Coolest, The Hippest convention giveaways at the San Antonio WorldCon: we gave out temporary tattoos with our logo on them! If you want some, send us a sase and we'll mail a few back to you. I did keep a few back. Alexandria Digital Literature had the second-best giveaway, a terrific poster drawn by Margaret Organ-Kean and creatively "distressed" by Dave Howell.

Lisa Waters and I survived San Antonio; it was hot, but not too uncomfortable, and if you walked along the famous "RiverWalk", it was quite pleasant. I did panels about editing and art direction (and a small workshop on manuscript prep, organized at the end of one of my editing panels), and contributed a mock Victorian oration to Josepha Sherman and Toni Weiskopf's children's folklore project. (I'm hardly a child, but the piece I wrote down for them was something I memorized when I was ten or eleven: it begins, "Ladies and Jellyspoons! I come before you to stand behind you, to tell you something I know nothing about.") During the convention, I fitted in a brief hour of Regency dancing, enjoyed a fine dinner while gliding along the San Antonio River courtesy of DAW Books (thank you, Elizabeth and Sheila!), went to a circus museum and walked over to the Alamo, and bought a Xena poster in the dealer room. I bid on a few things in the art show, but only got one of them.

I did my stint as editor of the daily 'zine: I took the shift during the Masquerade, which freed other staff members to, ahem, report. I *believe* that when the results arrived, I was even able to spell them correctly. Working on the 'zine was a lot of fun even as I dealt with an entirely new desktop publishing program and stayed up later than I had intended. Tom Becker, who oversaw the whole project, had hoped that a simple program (Claris Works) would be best, but it turned out most of his staff would have been more comfortable with PageMaker or Quark Express because they already knew how to use them. So Tom and I ended up collaborating on the layout: he sat at the keyboard and made things happen, while I told him where I thought each article and picture should be placed. Then we fine-tuned the layout together. The 'zine had all the benefits of modern technology: not only did we have high-powered computers, someone brought a digital camera, which meant that we didn't have to wait for even one-hour photo processing: pictures were just downloaded directly into the layout computer! A few minutes later, probably even faster than we could print out our master pages and get them to the quick-Xerox place, Bill Humphreys had the photos up on the convention's web site.

Andrew Porter of *Science Fiction Chronicle* was kind enough to share his dealer table with *MZBFM*, though I was too busy to spend much time there. Still, we gave away a lot of copies of issue 33 from that table, and it was nice to have the space.

The tragic news about Lady Diana brought some sad moments, though, and I found myself having dreams about her for a few weeks afterward. The power of myth in all our lives is strong.

One of our artists — Rob Alexander — won a Chesley Award at the WorldCon, though unfortunately for us it wasn't for work we had published. But since I dragged Rob to every publisher's party I could find at the WesterCon (in Vancouver) where I first saw his work, and urged other editors and art directors to hire him, I was *very* pleased on his behalf.

Our other Art News is that David Cherry will probably be doing another cover for us, for a story by Susan Shwartz.

Overall, people seemed to have a good time, and the San Antonio committee is to be congratulated for hosting one of the better WorldCons in recent memory. Check my web page (linked to the magazine's) for some of my photos of things like the aardvark pianist in the Marriott lobby.

I've about decided to get a pager before my next convention, though, to save my feet amd disposition: that way when my roommate wants me to join her for dinner, instead of trying to track me through two different hotels, a shopping center, and the convention hall, she can have me paged and send me a code that tells me where and when I should meet her. In fact, I've evolved a whole set of codes, beginning with the sender's ID, then an indication of "message" or "desired action", and finally the relevant location.

For instance: If Joan wants me to call her at the SFWA Suite, which is room 9988 in the Hilton, she can send my pager "1-1-2-19988". My friend Lawrence thinks I need to add a code for "Having a short liaison — do not disturb for a few hours", but unfortunately I think my liaison days are over. I might use the code for "taking an exhausted nap,

MZBFM's "Secret Decoder Ring" for Pager Messages

First character is sender's ID
For instance:
1-my roommate, Joan
2-me
3-Joan's boyfriend Sam

Second is action desired/response
1-call my location
2-call your hotel for message
3-meet me here
4-I'll be delayed
5-I have to cancel

Third block is sender's location
1-my hotel, the Marriott HyperTower
2-party hotel, the Hilton Westin Days Inn
3-Convention Center

Fourth block is location detail:
1-sender's room number/party suite #
2-lobby
3-coffeeshop/bar
4-exhibit hall
5-MZBFM dealer table

lemme sleep", though.

I just finished a stint as a World Fantasy Award judge. I have never seen so many new books at once since I left the staff of *Locus*! By the end of my "tenure", I had boundless respect for my fellow judges, Diana Paxson, Nancy Collins, Joe Lansdale, and Paul Barnett, and especially for two editors who aren't judges, Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling, who read all the short works in the fantasy and horror genres *every* year and come up with **THE YEAR'S BEST FANTASY AND HORROR**. For the award, I read their ninth annual anthology. (Now, their title calls it a collection, but in the publishing trade, a collection is a book of stories by a single author, and an anthology is something like *Sword & Sorceress*, with a different author for every story.)

The 1995 Datlow and Windling anthology had some really good stuff in it. My personal favorites include Nina Kiriki Hoffman's "Home for Christmas", which leads off the volume, and the chilling internet fantasy "More Tomorrow" by Michael Marshall Smith. (One thing I noticed as I read fantasy fiction all year is that sex is almost always equated with evil; one could probably do several panels and keep a couple of psychiatrists employed for years debating why that is, but I suspect the simple answer is, it's an easy plot device. Luckily, in the real world, sex can be joyous, serious, funny, comforting, hopeful...our sexual (and in some cases, the sexual connotations of our deliberately non-sexual) connections with other people can express a wealth of emotional content. Anyway, I was pleased to read the exuberant sex scene in the delicious S.P. Somtow story, "Dragon's Fin Soup".) "The Granddaughter" is another delightful story in this volume, a story that stands Little Red Riding Hood on her pointy head.

Did you ever imagine you were adopted? I did; I was disappointed when I found my birth certificate because it meant that maybe my parents were telling the truth when they said they were doing all this stuff "for my own good". I had hoped that they were being mean to me just because I wasn't really theirs, and that somewhere there were my **real** parents who loved me better. As an adult, I can't even remember what dastardly deeds my parents had committed to deserve my scorn, but it was probably something terrible like not letting me stay up till midnight. The scary everydayness of "Switch" by Lucy Taylor is based on that kind of childhood wish.

And my favorite story (so far! I still have 150 more pages to look forward to) in this batch is the sublime "Resolve and Resistance" by S.N. Dyer, an absolute **must** for all Jane Austen and Georgette Heyer fans. All these stories are in Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling's **THE YEAR'S BEST FANTASY AND HORROR: NINTH ANNUAL COLLECTION** from St. Martin's Press (for works published 1995). The World Fantasy Convention this year is in London, in late October; its web site is http://www.farrsite.com/wfc/wf4.htm.

Late-Breaking News

We're going to hold a Fantasy Worlds Festival, and Barbara Hambly will be our Guest of Honor!!! The last one was a lot of fun, but due to poor publicity and a wet weekend, we didn't have much turnout. But we'll do better publicity this time, and we picked a date when it's unlikely to rain. Since the next WorldCon will be held during August, FWF will be on Labor Day Weekend, 1998, at the Berkeley Marina Marriott, which is a very pleasant, affordable hotel with nice views of the San Francisco Bay. Details will be on our web page and in future issues of the magazine. Attendance will be capped at 300 people, so buy a membership early.

— *Rachel E. Holmen*

Funny...Clever...Scary...Imaginative...What a Gift!

If you subscribe to MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S *FANTASY Magazine*, four times a year a beautiful new issue will appear in your very own mailbox. If you buy a sub as a gift, your friend will get four terrific issues (and an elegant gift card).

Subscription rates are $20.00 per year. Canadian subs are $27.00 (payable in U.S. funds); overseas subscriptions are $44.00. All subscriptions, including Canadian, are payable directly in U.S. funds only. Please make checks payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley.

❑ Yes, I'm enclosing payment for the next four issues. Start my new subscription with the next issue you send out.

❑ I don't want to miss any back issues, so here's my order for them as well. Please send me issues:

❑ 2 ❑ 3 ❑ 5 ❑ 7 ❑ 8 ❑ 14 ❑ 16 ❑ 17 ❑ 18 ❑ 20
❑ 21 ❑ 22 ❑ 23 ❑ 24 ❑ 25 ❑ 26 ❑ 27 ❑ 28 ❑ 29 ❑ 30
❑ 31 ❑ 32 ❑ 33 ❑ 34 ❑ 35 ❑ 36 ❑ 37

for $4.95 each (issues 2 through 33) or $5.95 (issues 34 and newer)plus $2.50 per order for postage. (See p. 3 for descriptions of back issues.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip _____

☐ Check enclosed ☐ Visa/MC information below

#_____ exp.____/____

signature:_____

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY* Magazine, Box 249, Berkeley CA 94701

The Cauldron — Issue #37

Story	Artist
❑ **Grey** by Mercedes Lackey	❑ Nick Jainschigg
❑ **Agent Problems** by J. G. Hemry	❑ Lynne Fahnestalk
❑ **Green Man** by Richard Calantropio	❑ Margaret Organ-Kean
❑ **Exterminator** by Cynthia McQuillin	❑ Kaja Foglio
❑ **Rogue Soup** by Janet Stewart	❑ Rob Alexander
❑ **Dark Queen** by Kathryn J. Brown	❑ Vincent Di Fate
❑ **Winterkill** by Colin Dunn	❑ Jonathan Hunt
❑ **The Isle of Despair** by Richard L. Purtill	❑ George Barr
❑ **Quickly Wise** by Devon Monk	❑ Barb Armata
❑ **Wallan's Sanity Test** by Carl Bowen	❑ Barb Armata

Only one ballot per reader, please!!!

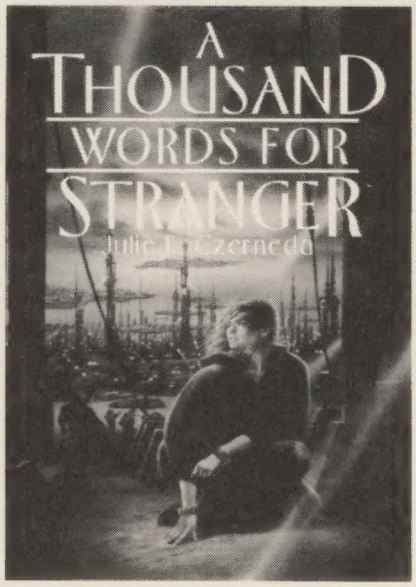
Vote for your favorite stories and artists, then send the ballot to:

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine*
P.O. Box 249
Berkeley, CA 94701

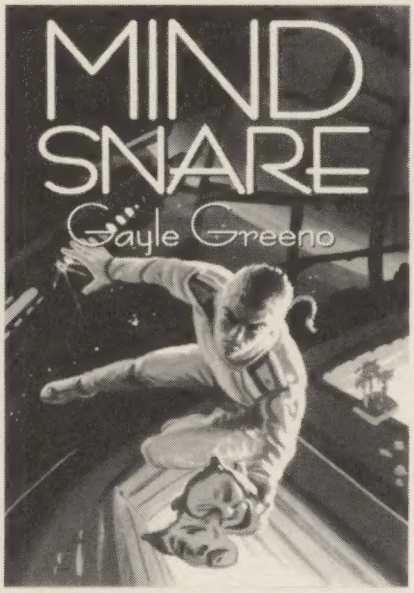
If you'd rather not tear out this page, a photocopy is fine, or just write your choices LEGIBLY and send us a letter. Mark 1 for first, 2 for second, etc.

Want a subscription? An order blank is on page 63. A back issue order form is on page 3. T-shirt information is on page 39 - we have 3X's in stock!.

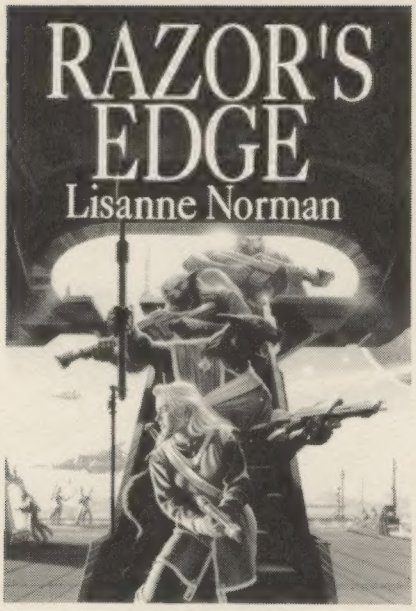
STELLAR SCIENCE FICTION *from* DAW BOOKS



A Thousand Words For Stranger
Julie E. Czerneda
0-88677-769-0
$5.99/$7.99 in Canada
(October)

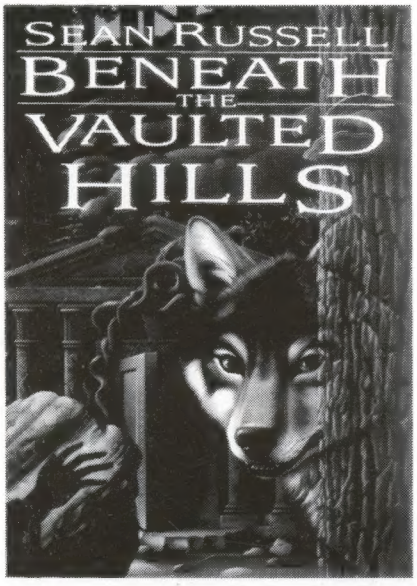


Mind Snare
Gayle Greeno
0-88677-749-6
$5.99/$6.99 in Canada
(September)



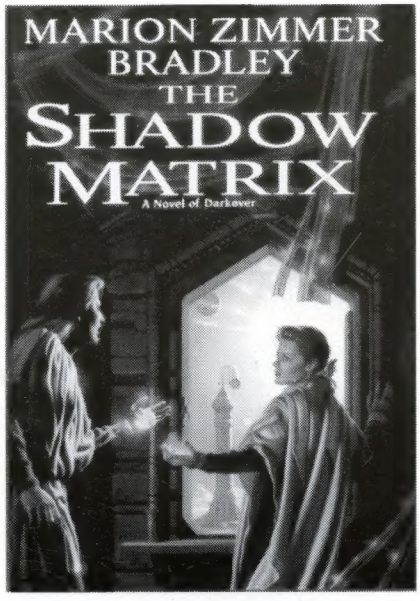
Razor's Edge
Lisanne Norman
0-88677-766-6
$6.99/$8.99 in Canada
(December)

DAW Books are distributed by Penguin Putnam Inc.

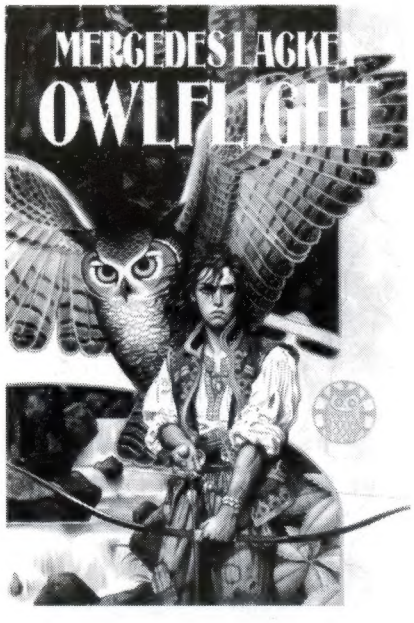


Beneath the Vaulted Hills
Sean Russell
0-88677-745-3
$24.95/$32.99 Canada
(August)

Fabulous FALL Releases *from* DAW BOOKS



The Shadow Matrix
Marion Zimmer Bradley
0-88677-743-7
$21.95/27.99 Canada
(September)



Owlflight
Mercedes Lackey & Larry Dixon
0-88677-754-2
$21.95/$27.99 Canada
(October)

DAW Books are distributed by Penguin Putnam Inc.